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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ARTAUD, GENET, SHANGE: THE ABSENCE OF THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY

BY

SEAN CARNEY ©

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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DEGREE: MASTER OF ARTS

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1994

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October 5, 1994

ABSTRACT

Antonin Artaud's words, engaged in a performative critique of the restraining complicity of thought and language, fail in their attempt to resist signification and "meaning." The dramatic performance in which these words try to avoid signification creates, within Artaud's unique manipulation of grammatological forms, a figurative image of the self attempting to escape representative existence. The purposely failed escape may be read as an enactment of the necessity for individuals to resist, within a socio-political sphere, repressive forms of representation which become imposed on ontology. Within the sphere of psychoanalysis, language plays an especial role in the formation of thought and perceptions within practical existence. Artaud's critique of language may be read as a move toward radical political action: real resistance to fascistic forms of social control and the writing of ontology by oppressive means. Jean Genet's *The Screens* and Ntozake Shange's *spell #7* move the performative need for resistance to signification out of the realm of the written text and onto the stage, where existence is portrayed as a Theatre of Representation, and the need for individuals to resist representational impositions of ontology is played out within overtly dramatic forms. If life is a Theatre of Representation, then what is represented is not a stable, fixed parameter, but is rather unfixed and malleable. Shange's work especially stands out as an example of how representation, in this case her theatre piece, can be used to fulfill the desire to "escape" certain significations by appropriating signifiers and rewriting their meanings. In this manner drama is not engaged in "telling a story," presenting another representation, but rather is using representation as a tool in the manipulation and political rewriting of signification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not be what it is without the support of these people:
My generous family, who gave me sanctuary and a nice place to work all summer;
Elyne Quan, who listened and cared enough to respond;
Val and Bill, two selflessly giving individuals who gave me haven in the last frenetic month of work;
and my thesis supervisor Dr. Debby Thompson. This work is a rhizome, and she is present within more than any of the names that are named.

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CHAPTER ONE: READING ARTAUD

Writing this thesis, I am often asked what it is about. Lately, I have not been able to supply anyone with an answer that satisfies me. Many months ago, I could have, with confidence, said "Antonin Artaud." Now, at a point where the work has a definable shape which I feel will not change radically, that answer is decidedly lacking in accuracy. It does not seem possible for me to give a full reply; I am conscious that something is always missing. "Antonin Artaud" still seems the "best" answer I can supply in a brief response, but it leaves me conscious of how much is not accounted for in that reply. Evidently, I leave out my considerations of plays by Jean Genet and ntozake shange.[1] However, what troubles me when asked the question is the arbitrariness to which it seems any reply must succumb. I am confronted with the dilemma which Michel Foucault analyzes in the essay "What is an Author?" The "subject" of his essay is the position of the subject, a matter which is also considered throughout this thesis. My readings and studies, which are reflected throughout this work, problematize reading and understanding, and further, disrupt the privileged position of "subject." My unsatisfactory reply brings to light a concept which may be viewed by the reader as one theme present throughout the thesis: the writings in this thesis all explore the presence of absence in the parameters of human thought, and how absolute absence as an ideological concept underlies the tradition of human discourse and intersubjective relations.

Foucault's essay is valuable not only for its evaluation of the notion of the "author" as a presence of absence, but also for its similar questioning of what constitutes a work. "What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work?"[2] Foucault asks. Obviously, my thesis is not about Antonin Artaud. I have only a group of writings which have, through a series of arbitrary rules and conventions, been grouped together under a heading "Artaud." It is the writings I am dealing with, yet as Foucault points out "it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself."[3] The problematization of the unity of the work is especially relevant in dealing with the writings of "Artaud," wherein I read a critique of the constancy of "subject." His writings are an attack on the parameters of language and communication in general. In other words, as I read them, the writings of Artaud are engaged in a self-destructive process, questioning the possibilities of reading anything with "understanding."

---

[1] The absence of Capitalization when I discuss the work of ntozake shange is reflective (and respective) of her own stylistic techniques, which challenge the parameters of standard American English grammar.

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 103.

In a thesis which deals with writers who are engaged in critical attacks on ideals commonly termed "logocentric," I am guilty of the very deed which is being condemned. My argument posits a reading of various works by Artaud, many of which are separated by years, forms, and situations. Yet I assume a unity of "subject" behind them, a decidedly logocentric presumption that there is a singular "voice" which breathed forth everything lumped together under the parameters of "Artaud." But what I am guilty of is, at the bottom of things, the same assumption we all make when we read a book. Or even when we listen to someone else speak. In order for understanding to emerge, we assume a unity and connexion between one word and the next, a unity which assumes purposefulness and will always be arbitrary. We make the assumption that the "speaker" "meant" to express the meaning which we read. We assume that there is meaning before we can "find" it. Meaning is something which is always imposed upon the play of words by the receiver. Foucault observes that writing is "an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier"[4] and I feel that of importance to this interplay is the intersubjective relationship between the signifier and the receiver. My readings and interpretations of Artaud are not promoted as definitive or "true." They exist as subjective reactions.

I am defensive about my desire to provoke interest in Artaud's writings. It is not an unwarranted anxiety on my part. Régis Durand echoes my sentiments eloquently:

> To refer to Artaud today is somewhat problematic, distinctly not in fashion. There is, it is felt, something almost embarrassingly vociferous, personal, and metaphysical about him. Besides, too many pretentious epigones have given him a bad

---

[3] Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* 104.

[4] Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* 102.

name.[5]

"Artaud" today is marked by the apparently hysterical modernist sentiments which permeate *The Theater and Its Double* (hereafter abbreviated as *TD.*) His emphatic references to God, rituals, origins, and essences of human existence unknowable to us leave him open to easy dismissal today. My thesis does not dismiss Artaud as a stale, dated modernist. I have been substantially inspired by Jacques Derrida's two essays dealing with Artaud's works, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" and "La parole soufflée,"[6] which firmly plant Artaud in the post-structuralists' pot. These two essays, which I consider seminal materials in any modern consideration of Artaud, are rarely dealt with by Artaud critics. Throughout my reading of Artaud I return to Derrida's readings as a means of illustrating my own.

Whereas I do not want to define my reading of Artaud as the "correct" reading, my thesis does imply that *TD* has, for the most part, been misread. I have encountered little criticism which takes into account the paradoxes and contradictions in Artaud's writings. Following Derrida, I place myself within the post-modern sentiment which rejects the notion that Artaud's ideas are "flawed by a logical inconsistency which lies at the very core of of his theories."[7] Rather, I propose that it is possible to read "meaning" in the logical inconsistencies of the writing.

I do not deal with Artaud's own practical theatre experiments. I consider them, if not failures, then unrepresentative of what I read in *TD.* If Artaud succeeds in creating a notable performance anywhere, it is in his own writings. My approach reflects Artaud's belief that in the communication of art in Europe the only difference between writing and performance is the kind of signifier being used: "For the theater as it is practiced here, a written word has as much value as the same word spoken."[8] Within its context, this quotation serves to condemn the primacy of written language, but Artaud's own privileging of writing throughout his oeuvre inclines me to privilege my own reading of his criticism. Throughout my thesis I consider his writings as a form of written performance.

---

[5] Régis Durand, "Theatre/SIGNS/Performance: On Some Transformations of the Theatrical and the Theoretical," in *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*, eds. Ihab Hassan and Sally Hassan (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) 218.

[6] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[7] Mick Martin, "Theatre of Cruelty: Artaud's Impossible Double," in *Nottingham French Studies* vol. 22, no. 1 (May, 1983): 52.

My reading of *TD* results from a study of Artaud's poetry, writings wherein the theatre is seldom referred to. As I see it, his poetry focuses on the interchangeable ideas of the self and the work. Derrida reads Artaud's poetry as a supplement to *TD*. In a like manner, I first approach Artaud's poetry, develop a technique of reading meaning in the poems, and then carry that technique over to a reading of *TD*. Subsequently my analysis of shange's *spell #7* and Genet's *The Screens* is supplemented by my reading of Artaud's written performances in his poetry and in *TD*. These plays realize in dramatic forms the concepts I read in Artaud's writings. While I seek similarities and parallels between these works, I am not interested in exploring whether or not shange and Genet have created examples of "The Theatre of Cruelty." If an answer to this question were demanded, I would answer "no" and move on to my actual purpose in this thesis. These plays construct characters which challenge the traditional concepts of stage representation. My approach is to examine the different modes of ontological representation found within the plays, and to propose how these unusual characterizations provide commentary on problems of ontology in the realm of practical experience.

Understanding the full context of what Artaud wrote: This means appreciating the performative nature of writing, not just in Artaud's poetry, but in *TD* as well. Note this description of the lecture "The Theatre and the Plague" as it was initially delivered in a conference which was observed by Anaïs Nin. She reports what Artaud did midway through the delivery of his paper:

> ...then, imperceptibly almost, he let go of the thread we were following and began to act out dying by plague. No one quite knew when it began. To illustrate his conference, he was acting out an agony. "La Peste" in French is so much more terrible than "the Plague" in English. But no word could describe what Artaud did on the platform of the Sorbonne. He forgot about his conference, the theatre, his ideas, Dr. Allendy sitting there, the public, the young students,

---

[8] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 117.

> [Allendy's] wife, professors, and directors.
>
> His face was contorted with anguish, one could see the perspiration dampening his hair. His eyes dilated, his muscles became cramped, his fingers struggled to retain their flexibility. He made one feel the parched and burning throat, the pains, the fever, the fire in the guts. He was in agony. He was screaming. He was delirious. He was enacting his own death, his own crucifixion.
>
> At first people gasped. And then they began to laugh. [...] But Artaud went on, until the last gasp. And stayed on the floor. Then when the hall had emptied of all but his small group of friends, he walked straight up to me and kissed my hand. He asked me to go to the cafe with him.
>
> [...] We walked, walked through the dark streets. He was hurt, wounded, baffled by the jeering. He spat out his anger. "They always want to hear about; they want to hear an objective conference on 'The Theatre and the Plague,' and I want to give them the experience itself, the plague itself, so they will be terrified, and awaken. I want to awaken them. They do not realize they are dead. Their death is total, like deafness, blindness. This is agony I portrayed. Mine, yes, and everyone who is alive."[9]

Artaud was performing his concept for the unappreciative audience, enacting the plague victim for them. The performance was, quite aptly, both "The Theatre" and "the Plague." His paper, then, was not so much a telling of the ideas within it, as it was a showing. The paper is meant to be accepted as performative. In his conference Artaud provided the opportunity for his listeners to view Plague as an enactment of Life, his life at least. As in all figurative imagery, the responsibility is upon the reader to determine what the image signifies.

Again, understanding the full context of what Artaud wrote: His relationship with the written word is challenging and antagonistic. When Artaud writes "All writing is pigshit,"[10] ("Toute l'écriture est de la cochonnerie,"[11]) the phrase has a double meaning. This is perhaps more evident in the French, since the word *cochonnerie* is a noun for filth or stupidity, but is also a derivative of the word pig (cochon) and thus clearly carries the connotation of "product of the workings of a pig." The twin meaning of the phrase is that all writing is both as useless as shit, in a vernacular sense, and literally a form of excrement. This condemnation of writing is directed towards "Those for whom certain words have a meaning."[12] Artaud attacks the idea that meaning can be communicated through words. He criticizes the association of signifier and signified, he sees the two as forever divorced, the former, in his terminology, being ultimately meaningless. Artaud's phrasing, "All writing is pigshit," is significant in that he is writing at the same time literally and figuratively, and the paradox within his mode of communication is functional. Artaud criticizes all writing as always already figurative, without fixed meaning; yet when I examine closely his own use of words I discern a subtle move towards an erasure of the seeming binarism between the literal and the figurative. Within this erasure neither are privileged, and both are present at the same time. If I privilege a literal reading of the notion of "signifiers as excrement," I perceive a privileging of "ideas" discernable here, that "theory" and "meaning" are antecedent to signifiers. However, self-referential as these words are, they seem, at the same time as they communicate literal meaning, to be figurative embodiments of their own "subject." The word *pigshit* is simultaneously figurative and literal. There seems no reason to privilege one reading or the other. The distinction between the literal and the figurative appears a superficial differentiation. I read "All writing is pigshit" as a performance of the paradox of discursive communication. The paradox requires the "presence" of "meaning" to lie somewhere antecedent to words. "Artaud" believes that words betray the communication of ideas, yet he has only words with which to communicate his theory. Artaud is trapped by his means of communication, he knows it, he knows there is no escape, and so the best he can do is thrash around within the straitjacket of words and hope that the reader will perceive his struggle occurring beneath/ behind/ around/ within his words. Throughout Artaud's writings his use of paradox and incongruity performs his struggle with words. His writings seem to imply that if all writing is, as signifiers, meaningless "pigshit," then all communication is ultimately figurative - signifiers without intrinsic meaning. However, if the distinction between the literal and the figurative is collapsed, then a phrase like "All writing is pigshit" may be read as always simultaneously literal and figurative.

---

[9] Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, vol. 1, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: The Swallow Press and Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1966) 191-2.

[10] Antonin Artaud, *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights books, 1965) 38.

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[11] Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes* vol. 1, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976) 100.

[12] Artaud, *Artaud Anthology* 38.

Artaud's general use of paradox, what has elsewhere been referred to as "logical inconsistency," is indeed problematic, but also key. Yes, he frequently makes use of paradox, but to assume that he is not aware of his contradictory ideas would be an error. He reveals his awareness seldomly, but in significant passages:

> "All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to dissimulate it. True expression hides what it makes manifest. It sets the mind in opposition to the real void of nature by creating in reaction a kind of fullness in thought. Or, in other terms, in relation to the manifestation-illusion of nature it creates a void in thought. All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void. And the lucid language which obstructs the appearance of this void also obstructs the appearance of poetry in thought. This is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would reveal have [*sic*] more significance for the spirit than the lucidities of speech and its analytics.[13]

If I accept the seemingly literal meaning I read in this passage then the writing becomes frought with paradox. The privileging of figurative language here is communicated in a literal reading of the text. If I accept this reading, then ironically I do not accept this reading. Again, his words, even as they literally describe a privileging of images and figuration, seem to me to be moving towards a common ground where the literal and the figurative are not set in opposition to each other. I find my conclusion somewhat slippery and nebulous, perhaps an impossibility. Foremost in my reading is the quotation's structure. The words are self-referential, drawing attention to themselves as a performative paradox. Within Artaud's thought poetry is described as a process of images, images which mask meaning, and transfer feeling by hiding it, rather than trying to explain it. His words reflect the central concern for a void, for the presence of an absence which is set in opposition to thought and feeling. It is "the idea of the void" which these words are concerned with, yet paradoxically language obstructs (and by obstructing, creates) this void. Absence is here established as an idea which accompanies and enables thought and language as an always present antithesis of thought. This reference to the absolute nature of absence will recur frequently. As I shall illustrate, Artaud often writes to make his words images, masks, effigies. He writes to make his words a performance whose function will be defeated by its nature as signifiers. The struggle must be noticed. Since there can be no escape from expression as representation, he endeavours to portray the struggle in his art, rather than trying to escape representation. Further, and this factor is one that will separate Artaud's thought from modernist sentiment, the process of this performative struggle involves the creation of the illusion of an end, "true expression," which must be strived for despite the awareness that it is not attainable because it does not exist. The indicator that it does not exist lies in its association with the Void, an always absent presence.

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[13] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 71.

Artaud's poems are his most vivid realization of life (his life, at least) as a performative paradox. "Here where I stand" is a poem about a man named "Antonin Artaud" for whom it is crucial to somehow recreate himself into

> a whole
> body which
> which isn't
> a spiritual body
> but a man's body
> which moreover
> is not a being,
> which is the true body
> of the absolute slash.[14]

Artaud's body will be a creation which is and is not. This paradox is even present in the structure of the above poem, the grammar of which makes it difficult to determine just what the "true body of the absolute slash" is. In my reading, "Artaud's body" is (not) born of divine creation, (not) created from the absolute slash. The absolute slash connotes various possible images to me - for example: a primal vagina from which all created beings come (I read in Artaud's writings a critique of the connexion of absence and the feminine - a linkage which I will later pursue further); or possibly a symbol of the orificial creation from which all beings differentiate; or the line of absolute difference which always already divides signifier from signified. "Artaud's" body will be a body that has not been created. This seems a paradox and an impossibility, and moreover, a paradox which Artaud is aware of:

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[14] Artaud, *Artaud Anthology* 204.

> How will this body be made?
> It will be made in such a way
> that the problem of the elimination of matter
> will be in it originally
> eliminated.[15]

"Artaud" focuses upon the production of excrement in his self-made (un)body, and in his proposed solution his (un)body will be freed of matter to be eliminated, freed of excrement. At the same time, his (un)body will no longer be eliminated matter, it will no longer be a product of the absolute slash, the line of difference. Artaud's use of the word "body" in this poem, and in several others which I will examine, appears to me to be a invocation of an image which is always already both literal and figurative.

This poem told in the first person enacts a character specifically named "Antonin Artaud" who seeks to recreate himself as an essential self without representation. This unrepresentative self is troped by the image of the "uncreated body." The shape of the writing itself is an enactment, a figurative performance of the character's desire to create the essential within himself. By using pigshit-words to do this, he is defeated from the start, for the words, which are considered excremental through their nature as figures divorced from meaning, are interchangeable with his concept of the self/body. The poem is a performative image of Artaud's self. The body/self is an image, as figurative as words. However, I read the "body" as an image which, no matter how read figuratively, also remains at all times literal in its connotations. This performative struggle implies a breaking down of the distinction between the figurative and the literal, the result being that Artaud's words are effectively both literal and figurative.

The "impossible" images of destroying and creating the "body" seem to demand that a figurative reading of Artaud's poetry be privileged, but the presence of the word "body" complicates, for me, what might otherwise be a straightforward piece of figurative poetry. Jane Gallop describes the paradox which readings of the "body" carry in human thought:

> Bedrock given, a priori to any subjectivity, the body calls out for interpretation, hermeneutic solutions to its being-as-riddle. The human being cannot help but try to make sense out of his own idiosyncratic body shape [...] Outside the theological model there is no possibility of verifying an interpretation: no author to have

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[15] Ibid.

> intended a sense in composing such a body. No guaranteed sense, but still there is a particular shape, intimating associations, molding and containing the "anarchic foam." A shape which by being distinct and diacritically not another shape (tall, not short) is a signifier, the signifier as enigma, teasing allusion to a signification to-be-guessed, yet without a puzzle-master to pronounce the verdict of "correct divination." [...] The theorizing is precisely endless, an eternal reading of the "body" as authorless text, full of tempting, persuasive significance, but lacking a final guarantee of intended meaning.[16]

The body is and is not a signifier, in the mind of the beholder. It seems to demand "meaning" be attributed to it, thus functioning as a signifier, a figurative image, yet the concrete matter of the body precedes readings, exceeds interpretations. Artaud, criticizing the desire to imagine a "self," a "spirit" which has primacy over the body, declares that

> The body that works has no time for thinking or,
> as they say, making up ideas.
> Ideas are only the voids of the body. [...]
> [...] it's that body has always existed, I say
> body, and its manner of life or existence never
> had anything to do with
>   not only what is called spirit or idea,
>   but what we call the soul.
>   The body is a fact which dispenses with idea
> and all feeling emotion[17]

This body, as I "read" it, is always already literal and figurative, within the realm of human discourse. Artaud's use of the "body" in his writings serves to undermine the seemingly stable differentiation between literal and figurative communication. When Artaud describes a desire to destroy the organs of his body, to be a "Body Without Organs"[18] as the popular phrase has been defined, the desire being described asks for no privilege of either a figurative or literal reading, instead invoking both readings simultaneously.

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[16] Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)12-13.

[17] Artaud, *Artaud Anthology* 111-112.

[18] "The body is the body,/ it is alone/ and needs no organs,/ the body is never an organism," in *Artaud On Theatre*, ed. Claude Schumacher (London: Methuen, 1989) 173.

My understanding of Artaud has been broadly informed by Jacques Derrida's reading of Artaud, as well as by Derrida's own theoretical writings. Here I address Derrida's work *Of Grammatology*, which is not concerned explicitly with Artaudian thought, but rather specifically the concept of logocentrism as Derrida defines it. It is not surprising that Derrida would elsewhere find much to comment on concerning Artaud's writings, since Artaud's poems criticize the same ideas that *Of Grammatology* deconstructs. Derrida's argument posits that the privileging of the spoken word as precedent to the written word is based on logocentrism: the desire for an absolute presence, an essence, a truth, a transcendent first cause which lies ever precedent to all ideas and meanings which we communicate. Derrida, in his analysis of logocentrism in language, declares that "From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs."[19] Having defined a structure of understanding which exists only as signs, he calls the desire for logos the desire for "the transcendental signified,"[20] a signified which is the source of all signifiers. This desire, this logocentric mentality, once defined as a linguistic (or rather grammatological) desire, is then expanded to a broader spectrum of human thought:

> [...] writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems - conversely - to borrow its metaphors.[21]

Concepts of logos, God, the Absolute, truth, are mutually self-supportive ideas, perpetuating each other throughout the realm of human discourse, which is itself based on the logocentric concept of the will to truth.

Derrida's association of writing (the signifier) and the body as a signifier may also be closely associated with Artaud's own focus on the body and his use of words to constitute the self. Logocentrism, explains Derrida, is part and parcel of the system of thought which produces the idea of a subject which exists prior to action, to the Body. Writing, one learns from Derrida's work, is considered an aspect of the Fall, and in this sense is original sin. When Artaud presents the desire for the "essential uncreated" as an impossible endeavour, he engages in a critique of the idea of Logos, an attack defined by Derrida as an "heresy." The final victim of this conflict is the idea of the subject. The desire to "read" the body, the desire described by Gallop, is a logocentric desire.

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[19] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 14.

[20] Ibid., 49.

[21] Ibid., 35.

Derrida connects the concept of logos with the spirit, the breath, the word, and in "La parole soufflée" he notes Artaud's rejection of breath, of language, of words, all of which are, in Artaud's vocabulary, just eliminated matter; excrement. Artaud's rejection of pigshit-words is always already frustrated by his constant use of them to enact the rejection. His poetry performs the impossibility of his desire in a complex and conscious manner:

> I am stupid the moment I assume an air of discourse
> it is with my breath
> and my breath
> and my hand that I've always made
> my body whole
> and suppressed every thing
> and every being
> and my breath
> does what it does
> to stop the life of beings
> who are not me.[22]

With his breath Artaud creates words. With his hand he creates words. And with his breath and his hand in his words he has made his body "whole"- here is an image of self-creation through discourse, discourse which makes him "stupid." Discourse always already defeats him because it is both complicit in his method and the thing he seeks to attack. As I read the above passage, Artaud's attempts to make his body whole and undifferentiated through speech and writing are perpetually frustrated by his simultaneous declaration that discourse itself is eliminated matter. Within Artaud's context the creation of words is the creation of the self. Words trope the body. Discourse functions as a trope for the self, and since words are differentiated matter, so the body too is excremental. The poem is an embodiment, a performance of the impossibility of what Artaud seeks to do to himself. The poem is an image of his self, eliminated matter constantly seeking to essentialize itself, and being frustrated, no matter how close it may come. Yet at the same time, I have trouble accepting my own figurative reading of the image of the body in this poem. Discourse, speaking, also functions literally as an inhalation of air which keeps the body alive. The reference to the body cannot be divorced from the literal fact of the body. Artaud, seeming to condemn the excremental status of signifiers, at the same time appears to be engaged in a subtle attempt to transcend this excremental nature in his own writing.

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[22] Artaud, *Artaud Anthology*, 204.

Although "Here where I stand" is a poem from the 1943-1948 period of Artaud's writing career, I propose that his writings reflect a fundamental similarity of theme from the beginning of his career in letters to the end. This is the logocentric assumption which I announced I was guilty of at the beginning of this chapter. I see the attempt to show rather than tell as present throughout the whole of Artaud's oeuvre. It was only the directness, the lucidity of his method that perhaps became more cardinal, and paradoxically more difficult to decipher, as time passed. Further, the paradox of creating that which is not created is a theme pervasive throughout Artaud's oeuvre. Take for example this passage from *L'Ombilic des Limbes*, written in 1925, which describes a desire to eradicate the very concept of "work of art":

> Here where others offer up their works I pretend to nothing more than showing my mind.
>
> Life is a burning up of questions.
>
> I can't conceive of a work detached from life. [...]
>
> You have to do away with the mind, as with literature. I say the mind and life communicate at all levels. I want to make a Book that will derange men, that will be like an open door leading them where they would never have consented to go. A door simply ajar on reality.[23]

The concept of a work of art undetached from existence is portrayed as antithetical to the accepted idea of Art. Art that is not art, just as in "Here Where I Stand" he seeks to create a body that is not a body. I also note the association by Artaud of the mind and literature, thought and words, which he treats as mutually culpable in the obstruction of communication. He wishes to erase the line between them, eliminating both. Artaud attempts to describe his ideal form of art as "a door simply ajar on reality," and I interpret this image as an attempt to describe uncreated art - a paradoxical notion.

The image of the door ajar is problematic and contradictory, and these qualities make it useful for a possible approach to reading the figurative images in Artaud's poetry. At moments Artaud's writings cease to inform the reader about the need to reconstitute Art, and instead create figurative images which mask or serve as effigies for the ideas concerning uncreation which Artaud seeks to communicate. These images are as easily readable literally as figuratively. To privilege one reading means to ignore the other, which also appears present. Following the sense that Artaud's writings critique the distinction between "words" and "meaning," I propose a means of reading Artaud's writings as simultaneously literal and figurative.

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[23] Ibid., 26.

Within the context of Artaudian thought words trope the body, the body tropes the self, and at the same time the body always remains "the body." "Artaud" is a figurative image, illustrating the idea that our selves are figurative images that we do not perceive as figurative. Within this context the ego may be understood as a signifier without "meaning." "Artaud," in his poems, is a performance of a man who rejects all "works of art" in order to be the art, and to merge art with life undifferentiated. Words, the body and the self seem to be interchangeable figures:

> Who Am I?
> Where do I come from?
> I am Antonin Artaud
> and if I say it
> as I know how to say it
> immediately
> you will see my present body
> fly into pieces
> and under ten thousand
> notorious aspects
> a new body
> will be assembled
> in which you will never again
> be able
> to forget me.[24]

This poem from the latter part of Artaud's life demonstrates to the reader, through the troping of body and words, what "Artaud" seeks to do to himself. His description of the destruction and recreation of his body is also a figurative description of the creation of the subject through words. "Antonin Artaud," by saying his "own" name, by invoking himself the logos of the self as he "knows how to say it," will figuratively destroy the differentiated body and create a new one, the "Artaud" that is the work of art himself.

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[24] Antonin Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Norman Glass (Los Angeles: Panjandrum Books, 1982) 92.

However, if the body is never just the body, but is always the reading of the body, then the body is always figurative. If the body if always figurative, the above words are a literal treatment of an always already figurative signifier. The seeming figurativeness of Artaud's writing is a result of a literal treatment of a figurative image. Through the trope of the body, the words are consciously literal and figurative at the same time. The poem performs the impossibility of Artaud's desire, and the poem is immediately self-referential. Artaud wrote a poem about a man named "Artaud," and this man plans to say (perform/ enact) his own name as a means of destroying and reconstituting his body. Thus the poem is about the poem, through the trope of the body of "Artaud." The poem's structure is an enactment of what the poem is about.

Kimberly Benston has described the use of figuration which is designed to be received literally as a process called "troping-a-dope," and Henry Louis Gates has broadened the subject to include a number of different modes of "Signifyin(g)."[25] Signifyin(g) is Gates' term for a number of different linguistic tools, some of which have in common this function: they are a means whereby a speaker (or writer) uses figurative imagery with the purpose of having a receiver read it literally. If the receiver reads it literally, he has been Signified upon. It is a tricky business, on purpose; a mode of communication whose sometimes purpose is to trick the receiver into (mis)understanding a figurative statement as literal. Signifyin(g) constitutes a manipulation of linguistic forms which undermines the binarism between the figurative and literal, with the result the figurative and the literal are always already present within Signifyin(g). Artaud, in writings, may be described as Signifyin(g) on his readers, but here I engage Gates to highlight the difficulty of perceiving figurative images as figurative: The more figurative the figurative images are, the less possible it will be to decide what these images are effigies of. In a successful "troping-a-dope," the literal meaning of the statement will (at least initially) be missed. Within the overtly poetic the impetus on the reader to read images figuratively is not an unusual demand. The focus of poems is commonly on the interpretation of the words. "Meaning" is accepted as something which must be dug up and discovered, or more specifically which must come from the reader. To make such a demand on the reader of *The Theater and Its Double* is a trickier task. The book is a series of essays and manifestoes, none of which is actually composed in the "shape" of a poem. Should not a manifesto be taken literally? Is not its purpose to try and tell the reader something as lucidly and clearly as possible? If you answer affirmatively to that question, you also assume a trust in the power of language to communicate truth. As Artaud certainly does not assume the latter, his belief in the former should also be questioned. What happens when Artaud, both partner and enemy of pigshit-words, writes a manifesto describing a "Theatre of Cruelty?" In the first manifesto, at least, Artaud appears to be trying to explain to the reader in a clear and literal manner how to achieve his aims. However, if Artaud's writings are deconstructing the binary distinction between the "figurative" and the "literal," with the result that both are always already present, then these manifestoes are open to new readings.

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[25] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 52.

One keystone poem serves in my analysis as the bridge between the "clearly" figurative poetry such as "Here Lies" or "Here Where I Stand" and the seemingly literal manifestoes in *TD*. This crucial poem is a late one entitled "The Theatre of Cruelty," written well after *The Theater and Its Double* was published. I read the impossible imagery in this poem both figuratively and literally, without privileging either. The fragment I quoted above, "Who Am I?," is a post-scriptum for this poem. Within this poem the concept of a Theatre of Cruelty is described like Artaud's body is in other poems, which is to say that "the Theatre of Cruelty" appears to ask for a simultaneously literal and figurative reading:

> The Theatre of Cruelty
> is not the symbol of an absent void,
> of this void's appalling incapacity for
> realization in living life
> It is the affirmation
> of a terrible
> and moreover overwhelming necessity.[26]

A significant rethinking of just what Artaud means by the term Theatre of Cruelty seems in order. The Void behind thought is described as "absent," and thus paradoxical: how can Nothing be absent?

The major focus of the poem is roughly introduced in the opening section:

> Do you know anything more outrageously fecal
> than the story of god
> and of his being: SATAN,
> the membrane of the heart
> the ignominious sow
> of the illusory universal

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[26] Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts*, 85.

> who with her slobbering udders
> has never concealed anything from us
> except Nothingness?[27]

Artaud denounces the story of primal creation as "fecal:" excremental, a differentiation, while at the same time entwining the creation of logos with a bestial, maternal image, and calling it SATAN, thus stigmatizing it as the primal evil. The universal, essential parental sow, Artaud declares, is "illusory," a story that conceals from us "Nothingness." This maternal image is entwined with the construction (through obstruction) of the absolute absence, the Void. And all of this, including the idea of "god," is finally just a story. I read the misogynistic presentation of female body parts as performative, an enactment and critique of the gynephobic embodiment of femininity. This embodiment is called "a story." There is a compounding, a violent crushing together of imagery in this opening passage. Artaud challenges the function of words such as "universal," "original," "primal." The creation of logos here is portrayed as an illusion, a fakery which serves to create the idea of a concealed void, the "Nothingness." This concealment implies the absolute presence of absence that is this Nothingness. "Artaud" does not believe in an origin, he denounces it as a fictive idea concealing a void and simultaneously creating a void through the act of concealing it. However, Artaud acknowledges the destructive desire to believe in an origin. He portrays the desire for an origin in his writings as a desire which he cannot escape.

Having described a void, the poem then explains that this void, "the limbo of the demons' world," is "absent," and non-existent. "It will never meet with evidence," says Artaud. God's ploy is to turn humans away from "external physical life" and make them believe in the reality of the void. Artaud explains what must be done to escape belief in the void:

> The best way to cure oneself of it
> and to destroy it
> is to complete the construction of reality.
> For reality is not completed,
> is not constructed yet.
> On its completion will depend
> in the world of eternal life
> the return of eternal health.[28]

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[27] Ibid., 83.

[28] Ibid., 85.

Sometimes Artaud seems to contradict himself; a paradoxical concept must be described paradoxically. There is nothing, claims Artaud, except reality. But even conceiving of reality seems to imply that there is "other." In response to this implication Artaud's term reality is divorced from the idea that there is anything original, or precedent, which shapes reality:

> [...] god wanted to make man believe
> that things could be seen and grasped in spirit,
> even though there is nothing existent and real
> except physical life,
> and all that flees from it and turns away from it
> is only the limbo of the demons' world.[29]

The idea that there is Nothing besides reality is also an illusion produced by god, god being a word which I feel should be read as a trope for logocentrism. Logocentrism inspires the idea that there is a void aside from reality. The the idea of the void is a result of belief in the idea of god, of logos, of other.

This poem remains at all times difficult and contradictory. When Artaud describes the "human body" as an "electric battery"[30] such imagery seems to ask for a figurative reading. However when I read these words I keep in mind how the body both induces and challenges my desire to "read meaning" in an image. The words may be read as attempting to unify the literal and the figurative as a critique of language and thought in general. The human body is an electric battery, a packet of force. I read this as a very real description of the raw unconscious, the nonfigurative level of human thought. When Artaud claims that

> One has made the human body eat,
> one has made it drink,
> in order to avoid
> making it dance.[31]

there are both literal and figurative aspects to his statement. The "human body" seems to unite the literal and the figurative in its portrayal of the stark reality of the human body. The word "dance" I read figuratively, describing the movement of unconscious desire, the dance of the electric battery, free of conscious objectification:

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 83.

[31] Ibid., 84.

"who has ever tested other than on the plane of sexual life/ the incommensurable abilities of the appetites?"[32] Free of objects, desire would, in my reading, be free of representation. If the literal and the figurative are complicit, neither of them is implicit with unrepresentative desire, the "human anatomy dance." The poem describes the yearning to escape a belief in Reality which defines parameters for Reality. This is a rejection of modes of thought which imply that beyond the parameters of those modes of thought there could be something else. All that is associated with logos must be banished. There is no "truth" at the "heart" of reality, no "essence." It is a construction in the purest, most abstract sense of the word, without maker, without plan, without nemesis, without a template upon which the construction is based. Reality as an unconstructed construction. My reading of this poem as a performance of unrepresentation is supported by the gibberish words which interrupt the passages:

na dedanu
na komev
tau komev
na come[33]

Which may be read as a performance of signifiers without "meaning." As the body is a signifier which we want to read, but cannot, so do those gibberish words attempt a troping of the body.

The Theatre of Cruelty, described in seemingly concrete, literal terms in *The Theater and Its Double*, in this poem is subjected to a presentation which simultaneously invokes literal and figurative understandings. If the Theatre of Cruelty is the "dance of human anatomy" which is an image of unrepresentative desire, then the Theatre of Cruelty may be read both literally and figuratively. If life is representative, life may also be conceived of in a literal manner as a form of Theatre. "The theatre of cruelty is not the symbol of an absent void," (since the idea of a void is fictive,) it is rather the symbol of an "overwhelming necessity." The Theatre of Cruelty will complete the construction of reality, a "dance" which will free humans from belief in god, in logos, in the illusion of primal differentiation. The poem seems to ask that we reject all concepts of ideology, of communication, of contact of any kind with any one else in any form, all codings and territorializations, physical or mental, and that we embrace instead the simple physicality of the body, free of meaning or fictive filiality:

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 88.

> (It is not especially a question of the penis or
> the anus
> which should moreover be cut off and got rid of,
> but of the top of the thighs,
> of the hips,
> of the loins,
> of the entire sexless stomach
> and of the navel.)[34]

This passage I read both literally and figuratively. Sexual organs and orifices are the objectification of desire, literally, and at the same time symbols of desire. To reject both is described as a dance of human anatomy, or the Theatre of Cruelty, a performance of the self for the self, the elimination of signifier and signified. Communication, the poem claims, causes the illusion of creation; sexuality is a performance of the fictive prime creation; all human interaction, he seems to imply, is a performative act of differentiation, of creation, and resultantly serves to induce from us the illusion that Artaud calls god- the logos and the logosmaker. "The Theatre of Cruelty" is not simply about Theatre. It is a trope for unrepresentative life. Life as we know it is a Theatre of Representation.

The Theatre of Cruelty, not only a theatre form, but also a trope for existence, a figurative effigy, functions at once in a literal and a figurative manner. Whereas at points the writing in *TD* is vague about Artaud's aims and desires, at others it describes in clear and seemingly literal terms the plans for the Theatre of Cruelty. The impenetrable literality of the writing may be read as the indicator that something is being masked by the words:

> We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. This envelopment results, in part, from the very configuration of the room itself.[35]

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[34] Ibid., 86.

[35] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 97.

What is a single site, really? To truly create such an environment means to make the spectator and the actor a single entity. The full ramifications of "a single site" are that no differentiation of any kind can exist. Only in this way will the final barrier, that which lies between actor and spectator, be removed, and "direct" communication (one that avoids language of any kind) be possible. To be truly engulfed by the performance means to be the performance, to be performing yourself for yourself.

The above quotation is followed by a physical description of an actual barnlike theatre where the spectator will physically sit in the centre of the action and be surrounded by the actors and the performance. Obviously, the proposed auditorium falls painfully short of what the above quotation envisions it will do. Under such conditions the boundaries of stage and auditorium are merely reconfigured, rather than banished. This is not a "single site" without divisions. Rather than only trying to read these words literally, I propose that the concepts are described with such concrete images precisely so that they may also be understood as that: images. For the Theatre of Cruelty to truly be read as a visual trope for life, the enactment of it through words needs to invite, yet avoid "meaning." It must be constructed as a mask, an effigy, as an image (described with words) which shows, rather than tells. In this sense I find the Theatre of Cruelty presented in a way similar to that of the body in Artaud's poetry. As the body is a signifier without an author, asking for yet always beyond "readings," simultaneously literal and figurative, so seems to be the concept of a Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud's words are always engaged in the possibly futile attempt to enact, to perform, to show Artaud's ideas, while at the same time telling his ideas. Even if Artaud's efforts were doomed from the moment he went into action, his words becomes an enactment of the impossible desire of his actions at all stages.

The preface to *The Theater and Its Double*, "The Theater and Culture," lays out a number of ground rules for the figurative reader of the entire book. Even these ground rules require some extrapolation. The content of *TD* is described concisely in the first line: "Never before, when it is life itself that is in question, has there been so much talk of civilization and culture."[36] The question and subject of this book is Life, which I capitalize so as to define it apart from general concepts of life. My differentiation seeks to clarify what Artaud himself states as an afterthought to the preface: "when we speak of the word "life," it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating center which forms never reach."[37] Life, as defined in *TD*, has nothing to do with civilization or culture, which have "never been coincident with life, which in fact [have] been devised to tyrannize over life." The subject of *TD*, the Life that is being strived for, is absolutely separate from our existences as we know them, for after all, aren't we part and parcel of civilization and culture? There is a complication of seemingly straightforward terms happening in this preface. "We need to live first of all; to believe in what makes us live and that something makes us live - to believe that whatever is produced from the mysterious depths of ourselves need not forever haunt us as an exclusively digestive concern."[38] Here Artaud describes the desire to separate Life and Living from concepts of biology. His words echo the logocentric urge to associate Life with a source that is shrouded in mystery, a need to believe in an origin which is unrepresentable, an Absence. Artaud's definitions are an apt description of the desire for the transcendental signified, as described by Derrida. This unrepresentable source is, for Artaud, Life in an absolute, essential sense.

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[36] Ibid., 7.

The sensibilities expressed here, if read literally, are decidedly modernist in sentiment. However, as Derrida has pointed out, Artaud's writings reveal an awareness "that there has never been an origin."[39] *The Theater and Its Double* is a representation of the desire for logos, some essential source of Life, and the direct means to achieve this desire is described: "We must insist upon the idea of culture-in-action, of culture growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath."[40] Culture, as Artaud sees it, is differentiated, representative, and must be made to have some relevance to Life, to the inner source where the unrepresentable lies, in order for the reunion to occur. This must happen because

> All our ideas about life must be revised in a period when nothing any longer adheres to life; it is this painful cleavage which is responsible for the revenge of things; the poetry which is no longer within us and which we no longer succeed in

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[37] Ibid., 13.

[38] Ibid., 7.

[39] Jacques Derrida, *Writing And Difference* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 232.

[40] Ibid., 8.

finding in things.[41]

Artaud's proposal that the nature of culture be changed seems to create more problems than it solves. He explains that the chief element in the transformation of western culture should be the eradication of Art as Occidentals know it: "The library at Alexandria can be burnt down."[42] Art, in terms of Occidental culture, is merely an expression of, and ramification of, that culture as it stands. Neither of which have any connection with Life. Further, art is a trope for culture in the West, according to Artaud. Thus, Occidentals create art (writing, talking, defecating, a footprint in the mud, sneezing; everything that involves a separation of inert matter from the body, anything that is with the body and then away from the body fits into Artaud's definition) as something separate from themselves, and advocate "art for art's sake" to one degree or another, put paintings in galleries and go look at them sometimes. Resultantly our (Occidental) Art "is for us a dead thing, from which we derive nothing but static and aesthetic profit, the profit of an audience, not of an actor."[43] Occidentals' representative Art is a reflection of Occidentals' representative culture.

For European life to be conceived of as a Theatre of Representation it appears there must be an Other, where Representation is absent: "In Mexico [...] there is no art: things are made for use. And the world is in perpetual exaltation."[44] Artaud's Orientalism, evident here and elsewhere in his writings, appears to be a necessary part of the performance of logocentrism in his writings. His Orientalism reflects the belief in the Other, the presence of absence that is sought by logocentric desire. In this case, the Other is a "non-Occidental culture" which is undifferentiated. Without the Orientalist sentiments expressed in *TD*, the performance of logocentrism would be lacking a focus, the illusory ideal.

If the "profit" that the passive theatre audience gains is deemed meager by Artaud, then it is the same mean profit that Occidentals gain from their culture. Artaud's parallelism between theatre and culture requires extrapolation. Derrida highlights the unique position that the theatre holds as an art form:

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[41] Ibid., 9.

[42] Ibid., 10.

[43] Ibid., 10.

[44] Ibid., 11.

> [...] the theater itself is shaped and undermined by the profound evil of representation. It is that corruption itself [...] the actor is born out of the rift between the representer and the represented. Like the alphabetic signifier, like the letter, the actor himself, is not inspired or animated by any particular language. He signifies nothing. He hardly lives, he lends his voice. It is a mouthpiece.[45]

For Derrida, the actor is a figuration of the split, the line of difference, between the signifier and the signified. The body of the actor, preceding yet inviting signification, holds a peculiar position on the stage. For Artaud, the actor, occupying this strange position between figure and meaning, may embody the possible unification of signifier and signified, and thus the effective erasure of both:

> THE ACTOR: The actor is both an element of first importance, since it is upon the effectiveness of his work that the success of the spectacle depends, and a kind of passive and neutral element, since he is rigorously denied all personal initiative. It is a domain in which there is no precise rule; and between the actor of whom is required the mere quality of a sob and the actor who must deliver an oration with all his personal qualities of persuasiveness, there is the whole margin which separates a man from an instrument.[46]

The presence of the actor's body occupies a neutral space, ironically signifying a signifier, without being one itself. On stage, the Body of the actor is both literal (a body) and figurative (a representation), a paradox which reflects the status of the body within the parameters of thought.

To pursue further Artaud's parallelism of theatre and culture is to posit that Occidentals are spectators to their own culture. Even actors onstage in an Occidental play are spectators. Derrida's reading of theatre illuminates Artaud's reading:

> The identity of the representer and the represented may be accomplished in two ways [...] the worse way: it is not illustrated by the actor alone (representer emptied of what he represents) but by a certain society, that of the worldly

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[45] Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 304-5.

[46] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 98.

> Parisians who have, in order to find themselves here, alienated themselves in a certain theater, theater of a theater, play representing a comedy of that society. "It is nevertheless solely for these people that theatrical entertainments are made. They are represented by fictitious characters in the middle of the theater, and show themselves in real ones on each side; they are at once persons of the drama on the stage, and comedians in the boxes"[47]

As an Occidental, the equivalent of a worldly Parisian, I am a spectator to myself, to my culture which is outside of me. This position is made possible by the Orientalist implication that there is an Other who is not subject to the performance of his or her self. Within each individual there is a performance: we are each spectators of our selves. This performative nature of existence illustrates why the theatre is the ideal trope for life.

If the theatre is, in *TD*, a figurative image, or trope, of life, then there is a curious doubling up of figurative images when *TD* describes figurative images for the theatre, such as "Plague." In times of plague epidemics, writes Artaud, a parallel event occurs within social structures and within the structure of the human body. This parallelism is the thesis of the essay "The Theatre and the Plague." The essay enacts the affective power of the theatre by claiming that the Plague operates upon humans in the same manner as theatre. According to Artaud,

> the plague seems to manifest its presence in and have a preference for the very organs of the body, the particular physical sites, where the human will, consciousness, and thought are imminent and apt to occur.[48]

These two sites, which Artaud claims the plague physically attacks, are the brain and the lungs. These physical sites on the body are the locations where, in Artaudian thought, the will, the sense of selfhood and consciousness are physically generated. Meanwhile, "social forms disintegrate"[49] and "regular forms collapse. There is no maintenance of roads and sewers, no army, no police, no municipal administration."[50] Artaud's association between the collapse of the body and the collapse of social forms is more than parallelism - rather it is a description of how plague operates as a troping device, somewhat as does language. By attacking consciousness and social structures, plague tropes one for the other. The body is described as a literal, physical site upon which figurative troping takes place.

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[47] Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 305.

[48] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 21.

[49] Ibid., 15.

Further, Artaud postulates a psychological element to plague that is just as powerful and effective as the physical plague. This he calls a "psychic malady"[51] and qualifies it as an illness which is not virally transmitted. (In a like manner, psychiatrists have defined a term, *folie à deux*, which describes quite simply the madness which "infects" one person after prolonged, enclosed proximity with another, mad, person. Psychiatrists observe that being around a crazy person can make you crazy.) This psychic malady, claims Artaud, has been historically associated with the theatre, for the theatre is a plague "that attacks not bodies but customs."[52] From Artaud's point of view, "the theatre, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative."[53] The theatre "is beneficial, for, impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world."[54] At the end of this essay, Artaud adds that the theatre as he has described it is an ideal form, not now in existence. It is the desire for the full potential of the theatre that is described: "And the question we must now ask is whether, in this slippery world which is committing suicide without noticing it, there can be found a nucleus of men capable of imposing this superior notion of the theatre."[55]

Derrida expounds a theoretical explanation of how theatre can be used as a plague to destroy the representational element of life. As Derrida reads Artaud, Occidental, Aristotelian theatre is but a pale mimesis of everyday life, which is itself just a pale mimesis of Life, which in turn is mimetic of nothing else, and thus unavailable to us. The theatre will be the site of the destruction of representation by becoming devoid of both subject and spectator, which are both tools of representation. Theoretically, an escape from difference, freedom from representation. Derrida's take on the concept: "It will not even offer the presentation of a present, if present signifies that which is maintained in front of me. Cruel representation must permeate me. And non-representation is, thus, original representation."[56] According to Derrida's reading of Artaud, once theatre is unrepresentative, free of both subject and spectator, it is universal, and thus, like the plague, erases the barriers of stage and auditorium and infects everyday life, freeing everyday life from representation through the same destruction of subject and self.

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[50] Ibid., 24.

[51] Ibid., 18.

[52] Ibid., 26.

[53] Ibid., 27.

[54] Ibid., 31.

[55] Ibid., 32.

Artaud does not clearly describe this theoretical approach in "Theatre and the Plague." Always performing his ideas through his writing, Artaud essentializes the elimination of representation into poetic terms. Derrida pieces together a reading of plague from a general understanding of Artaudian thought. Derrida proposes that if (and this is a big, theoretical if) an unrepresentative theatre is possible, then the achievement of this unrepresentative theatre and the absolute elimination of both actor and spectator must be universal, or it is not fully unrepresentative. If the erasure of actor and spectator is not universal and absolute, there is no erasure at all. Thus, as unrepresentation happens it bursts the restraints of the actor/spectator binarism and encompasses human culture in general. The localized elimination of actor/spectator is not possible. If the erasure of the binarism is localized then it is being spectacled by that which is outside the locality and is not really an erasure. If (again, a big if) this erasure of representation (as described by Derrida, reading Artaud, as an elimination of the actor/spectator binarism) is possible then by definition it is universal. This, then, is why theatre (which Artaud is using to trope life) without representation is like the plague. Derrida is skeptical about whether or not this unrepresentation is possible. His reading is more a presentation of the desire for that which is always already absent. It is the desire for the impossible which is portrayed in "The Theatre and the Plague." Further, as Anaïs Nin's description of the conference for the essay shows, Artaud presented the desire for the impossible as a performance of an agonizing paradox of existence.

Michel Foucault provides a complementary "reading" of the plague. Following the heritage of Nietzsche, Foucault's oeuvre grapples with the difficult task of highlighting in a philosophical manner social structures and modes of thought, and illustrating how they serve to create the truths which they repute to seek. One focus of his criticism is the Subject, which he proposes is a constituted result of discourse. In a sense it may be said that Foucault aimed to expose centrism at work in everyday life. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes a theory of Panopticism, the controlling and regimenting of human beings through their organization into systems wherein they are, or feel they are, under constant surveillance. He explains how Panopticism came into play during times of Plague:

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[56] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 237.

> Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere: 'A considerable body of militia, commanded by good officers and men of substance,' guards at the gates, at the town hall and in every quarter to ensure the prompt obedience of the people and the most absolute authority of the magistrates [...] A whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear. But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment of each individual of his 'true' name, his 'true' place, his 'true' body, his 'true' disease.[57]

One should not suppose that Artaud and Foucault are proposing opposing ideas of what occurs in plague situations, but rather that they each focus on opposing extremes of the same situation: complete chaos and complete order, chaos serving the erasure of the subject, order serving as the constitutor of the subject. The point in both cases is to illustrate how the plague, focused on the locus of the body, serves to destabilize the idea of subject no matter what happens. Whereas Artaud's reading of the plague focuses upon how the plague seeks to destroy the self by physically attacking the sites of consciousness in the body, as well as breaking down social structures, Foucault points out how those social structures seek to uphold and maintain the self-subject through the regimented cultivation of identity upon the site of the body. The "dream of the plague," the illusion of a breakdown of structures, actually serves in their reinforcement. With both Artaud and Foucault, there is a focus upon the body, and how its physical existence serves to create the self. The literal fact abets a figurative inscription of identity. The body is always both literal and figurative.

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[57] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 195-8.

Grant that the words in *TD* create images which are, in Artaud's terminology, "hieroglyphs" which may be decoded. This understanding of the figurative nature of words informs an analysis of Artaud's description of images. In "Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene" Artaud devotes a great deal of attention to the interpretation of van der Leyden's "The Daughters of Lot," and the process of his writing becomes an enactment of the interpretation of images. The essay postulates that the theatre is primarily a visual medium, like painting, and must escape the restraint of the written word. "The Daughters of Lot" is interpreted by Artaud as an example of "what the theater should be; if it knew how to speak the language that belongs to it."[58] The painting, Artaud's essay implies, is an image which through its visual composition encompasses all that is essential to human existence. This is obviously a profoundly subjective response to Art, but it is just this power that the theatre is entrusted with in *TD*. Crucial to coming in touch with this power is the mise en scene, the visual element to the performance which in Western Theatre is subordinate to the spoken word. The spoken word is treacherous, because it gives the illusion of truth, but in fact can never be achieve "truth:" "Nature, in giving a tree the form of a tree, could just as well have given it the form of an animal or of a hill; we would have thought tree for the animal or the hill, and the trick would have been turned."[59] This idea requires a careful extrapolation. On the one hand, it is an illustration of the treachery of logos, as an absolute word which we mistakenly accept as the essence of the object, even though it is a differentiated representation of the object and is not the object.

However, on the other hand, the criticism of logocentrism is more complicated than a simple condemnation of the grammatical signifier. Artaud refers also to the creation of the actual object itself in the above quotation, and describes objects themselves as a form of logos, of that differentiated prime creation. The assumption that everything was created by a creator implies that all things are representations. Their names are representations of the representations. Underlying this analysis is the presence of absence which the logos embodies - the absence which is an integral part of the processes of thought which constitute language; the transcendental signified, as Derrida calls it. This idea pushes the concept of mise en scene a step further than merely subordinating spoken words to the visual. In order for the concept of the subordination of language to be truly feasable, words must be seen as only symptomatic of a larger problem, the problem of representation in general. This larger problem is unaddressed in this essay, but is dealt with in "No More Masterpieces":

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[58] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 37.

[59] Ibid., 42.

> Let us leave textual criticism to graduate students, formal criticism to esthetes, and recognize that what has been said is not still to be said; that an expression does not have the same value twice, does not live two lives; that all words, once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered, that a form, once it has served, cannot be used again and asks only to be replaced by another, and that the theater is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice.[60]

Expression and communication, signifiers, are dead from the moment they exist. Artaud's method simply assumes the evidence of what it states so boldly. The strength of this composition is that in this manner the words become an enactment of the essential. However, the full weight of the concept of words as dead matter requires some extrapolation.

As a graduate student, I graciously accept the burden of textual criticism, and I again call upon Derrida to aid my understanding of the concept of words as dead matter. As Derrida reads Artaud, if something can be "taken" away by another then it is stolen, and this is the problem with language and speech - it is stolen the moment it appears. Language drops away from the body and becomes the excremental work without life, through the theft achieving "meaning" and thus falling down into representation, and becoming lifeless, inert matter. This theft of dead matter, the loss of speech, is "la parole soufflée" as Derrida defines it. His phrase encompasses both the idea of the word that is breathed out and lost, and speech as inspired by a divine creator. In Derrida's reading, the classical theatre is a performance of the original theft. The writer or director plays the creator, the other who inspires (and gives speech to) the subject on the stage. The subject becomes the complicit agent of theft. This concept does not require an auditorium to be put into practise. Even if there is nobody else to hear my speech, when I speak I become my own spectator. Even as I speak words (or even think words, Sean speculates, thinking words) the words never belonged to me, because I take the words from the "I" who spoke, enacting the theft, and repeat words again, catching myself in an endless cycle of representation of words:

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[60] Ibid., 75.

> As soon as I am heard, as soon as I hear myself, the I who hears itself, who hears me, becomes the I who speaks and takes speech from the I who thinks that he speaks and is heard in his own name; and becomes the I who takes speech without ever cutting off the I who thinks that he speaks.[61]

Thus I dialogue with myself, creating a "subject/self" and a spectator to my own words. Through speech I have created a sliver of difference within myself, I alone enacting the theft of the work which falls into meaning and representation. I am trapped within representation: a speaking subject, a self constructed by an other which is the "I" that spoke. The Occidental theatre, which enacts a dynamic between subject/spectator, is performing the internal difference between I and my self.

Further, this sense that your words are not yours, but you have a relation to your words, extends beyond the theft of language to the theft of the body, according to Derrida's reading of Artaud: "Ever since I have had a relation to my body, therefore, ever since my birth, I no longer am my body. Ever since I have had a body I am not this body, hence I do not possess it."[62] The logocentric mentality conceives that at the primacy before birth, the body is stolen by the other, whom Artaud calls God, and Derrida calls speech: "la parole." The idea of God the thief of the self is a description of our (fictive) original alienation from ourselves, and in that separation from ourselves we become representative, differentiated, inert matter, shit, filth, "art", a lowly representation of the undifferentiated body that was stolen from us before birth, and the same body that Artaud hopes to regain after death. It is a robbery of my truth, my Life. Underlying these ideas is the ever present absolute absence, something else, absent, which is portrayed as integral to what is present. Derrida reads Artaud's aim as a paradoxical reconstitution of himself as a body without works, as a pure, unpolluted body, for "the only thing that is not subject to commentary is the life of the body, the living flesh whose integrity, opposed to evil and death, is maintained by the theater."[63] Artaud's descriptions of his body are, within this context, descriptions of the desire for the literal body, the unfigurative fact of the physical form, which always precedes signification or "reading." The living flesh of the body transcends the schism of the literal and the figurative. It is both at the same time. Communication of all kinds, words, the theatre, Art, all trope life and trope excrement. Through Derrida's reading of Artaud, the theatre is not only a trope for life, it is a trope for the differentiated self. Following the logic of Derrida's reading, life is a trope for the differentiated self as well. The Body Without Organs may be seen within this context as an ideal concept of the self existing without dependence on concepts of the other, the absolute absence. If the body is always literal and figurative, the Body without Organs is, ironically, a figurative image of the literal body, free of figuration.

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[61] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 178.

[62] Ibid., 180.

As Derrida's Artaud reveals communication as differentiation, representation and inert matter, this concept of language as stolen matter can be logically extended beyond the realm of spoken communication into the realm of gestural and visual communication. Indeed, it is truly communication of all kinds that inevitably falls under the definition of "la parole soufflée." However, the idea that all forms of communication must be done away with is not immediately apparent in *TD*. "On the Balinese Theater," for example, describes extensively how the Balinese dancing caused in Artaud "the sense of a new physical language, based upon signs and no longer upon words [...] These actors with their geometric robes seem to be animated hieroglyphs."[64] Such a description is problematic, since Artaud seems to be trying to replace one set of representations (words) with another (gestures). The fallacy in this argument is evident. However, it is what is supposedly communicated through the dancing that alters the meaning of this "visual language." Artaud describes it as "pure theatre,"[65] "a language in which an overwhelming stage experience seems to be communicated."[66] Crucial to this experience is the idea that it affects all the senses as a whole, without separation, "and seems intended to encircle thought, to hound it down and lead it into an inextricable and certain system."[67] Thus, although Artaud uses the word "language" to describe the visual communication of this dancing, it is not a "language" at all.

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[63] Ibid., 183.

[64] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 54.

[65] Ibid., 53.

His use of the word language is treacherous, because of the connotations it carries. He tries to draw a distinction between telling (language, of words, of figures, of images. Here language applies to anything that tells a message or meaning) and showing. As a window shows, or a mirror shows - as a gateway into life; "a door ajar on reality." A mirror image is a repeated image and thus differentiated communication, but if all communication is figurative, and cannot be "read" literally, then what makes these images figurative? The frame? When I look through a window, have I placed a frame of communication around life? I do not know for certain the answer to this question, but I am inclined to say "no." My desire to give this reply, I feel, is the point Artaud is trying to get across. My desire is a human desire to inspire and describe communication without repetition; undifferentiated communication: Life. Once more I have described an impossibly paradoxical concept in Artaud's ideas, but, having already shown the importance of addressing paradox in Artaud's writings, my method will not ignore, but rather will explore, these "logical inconsistencies."

The Balinese dancers, says Artaud, through their movements and sounds show a "superior and prescribed Life."[68] "In this theater all creation comes from the stage, finds its expression and its origins alike in a secret psychic impulse which is Speech before words."[69] Even if these actors are hieroglyphs, they are not, in Artaud's ideology, signifiers of meanings. They are rather windows into that which is communication before language. Perhaps they are, as Derrida describes the actor, occupying a strange position between signifier and meaning, embodying the line of difference. On the other hand, Artaud's desire may be to describe the presence of the body on stage as something which must be consciously "read" in both literal and figurative manners, as opposed to "characters" in European plays, which are only figurative. In these dancers' bodies Artaud sees the unification of signifier and signified. Communication before/ beyond/ beneath language? A paradox? Meaning before communication? Is that possible? If language and communication are representation, then Artaud claims the Balinese show speech before representation: "The Balinese productions take shape at the very heart of matter, life, reality."[70] Artaud goes on to claim that "One senses in the Balinese theater a state prior to language and which chooses its own: music, gestures, movements, words."[71] This state prior to language, where an absolute lies, is described as an element of pure theatre: "The truth is that the Balinese theater suggests, and in its productions enacts, themes of pure theater."[72] Ideally it seems Antonin would be happy if the dancing, through its strength as performance, was, or became, that absolute state prior to language, but instead the dancing thematizes and performs the idea of pure theatre, rather than performing pure theatre itself. He describes a mode of performance as he would like it to be. Artaud's text always remains aware of the paradox it is performing for the reader, by attempting to describe communication which is not communication, meaning before language.

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[66] Ibid., 57.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 58.

[69] Ibid., 60.

Artaud expresses in "Oriental and Occidental Theater" what is implied in "On the Balinese Theater." He writes that the object of the theatre is to "express objectively secret truths, to bring into the light of day by means of active gestures certain aspects of truth that have been buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming."[73] He portrays the desire to create a theatre that will impossibly show that which lies prior to representation. However, Artaud is aware of the impossibility of his demands. I invoke a quotation which I presented earlier in this essay:

> "All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to dissimulate it. True expression hides what it makes manifest. [...] This is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would reveal have more significance for the spirit than the lucidities of speech and

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 62.

[72] Ibid., 65.

[73] Ibid., 70.

its analytics."[74]

If Artaud had opened *TD* with this passage, then the figurative nature of all the images he invokes throughout the different essays would have been sabotaged by message and meaning. His readers would have been forewarned that the images he describes are effigies and masks for something else, and knowing that would have attributed a hidden "meaning" to the images. The reader would have posited an absent presence. Artaud seeks to show, rather than to tell. "True expression hides what it makes manifest" he writes, and he is addressing the problem of placing essence behind image. Even that brief declaration is paradoxical. To read it literally means to read it figuratively. If he is hiding something behind that idea, then it may be that there is no "meaning" hidden behind language. All language is figurative. Everything I write is a lie: Instantly the words are a performative paradox.

The contents of *TD*, thematizing the touching of the essential in Life, and sometimes portraying a grasping for that essence, are purposefully frustrated by the form of their expression. Artaud's writing performs an irreconcilable contradiction of human existence, and *The Theater and Its Double* may be seen as a self-conscious performance of logocentric desire. Finally, following all of the logic that has been laid out in this chapter so far, my reading of Artaud's writings perceives the self-conscious nature of Artaud's words as a construction of his writing into a trope itself. Indeed, since the aim of *TD* may be to create images which are masks, tropes for something else, the actual written words too should be understood as a trope. The words, as images, are always both literal and figurative. *The Theater and Its Double*, the performance of paradox, becomes a trope for "Artaud." The words are an effigy of the self. This idea returns me to the self-referential poems in which a character named "Antonin Artaud" is described. I evoke a further comment made by Artaud to Anaïs Nin following the performance of "The Theatre and the Plague:"

> I feel sometimes that I am not writing, but describing the struggles with writing, the struggles of birth.

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[74] Ibid., 71.

CHAPTER TWO: VARIATIONS ON READING ARTAUD

The tradition of literary analysis, in my opinion, assumes that the author of a work has presented the work for public consumption because the author has become the master of his or her own work, in my case, his work. This is to say, there is a general assumption that the author assumes that he completely understands what he is discussing. I would even go so far as to say that the author participates in this general assumption of his understanding. Among other things, this assumption allows the reader to safely decide that the author is either "right" or "wrong." I feel this is an illusion of convenience which tradition has perpetuated. Further, I feel that the tradition of criticism assumes that each word in a text assumes a mastery of the previous word - assumes that the continuing process of discourse only happens because of the successful conquest of indecision or uncertainty. For the sake of simplicity, the illusion has been perpetuated and accepted that each completed word, each period in a text, is an indicator of mastery of what has come before.

Following this tradition, this, the second section of my thesis, would exist on the assumption that I fully understand and feel confident of the "correctness" of the subject matter in the previous section dealing with Artaud. Such ideas labour under the illusory presence of the "author," a concept which I see as a reflection of the belief in the stabilizing presence of absence which so integrally underlies the tradition of modern thought. For me to believe that I am a single, stable, present "author" who is the master of all that I will discuss in this thesis, is to succumb to a logocentric desire, to posit myself as an absent presence within my own text. If I accept the concepts of psychoanalysis described by Jacques Lacan, the desire to imagine myself as the master of my text is a drive which blinds me to my own resistance to my inevitable lack of complete understanding of the ideas in the text I have created. The importance of the lack is something I wish to emphasize. It is an integral factor in the drive for understanding which humans engage in. To wish to understand implies an absence of complete understanding. The absence is absolute, never achievable, an insatiable desire, and thus will always fuel the desire to master. However, humans must be blind to the untouchable nature of the Lack, because they must labour under the belief that it is accessible.

If mastery of understanding is not possible, is a limit which cannot be attained, we are not conscious at most times of its nature as a limit. Our blindness to this untouchable limit is our resistance. Resistance stands as a marker of that which I do not yet understand. Pure truth is never present, that which is always sought, always beyond our reach. In the process of writing and rewriting something, the author has the privilege of going back and, revising and rewriting, erasing points of resistance. The conventions of critical writing dictate that we attempt to cover up the process as best we can, thus concealing the structure and pattern of our thoughts, as well as concealing the "history," the "past" of the work. The ideas in critical writing are presented as Now, not Then. In other words, a limit attained. Lacan demonstrates that this is impossible, as the process does not seem to have an end, and so no matter how well one covers one's tracks, the unconscious will perpetually betray points of resistance to others. The work will always be a step into the past. We are always moving beyond that which we write.

Following the idea that full mastery is not possible, I wish to here present readings and understandings of Artaud's writing which differ from my own, not in order to necessarily prove them wrong or right, but to explore the validity of a plurality of understandings concerning a single "subject." While I do not accept the idea that there is a single "correct" understanding of a subject, some understandings are more valid than others. The theorizings which I present in this chapter are readings which, even as they differ from my own, I still consider accurate and valid readings of "Artaud."

Further, keeping in mind the factor of resistance, I wish to explore possible points of resistance which I find in the first chapter of this thesis, and explore how a pushing past these points of resistance, these locations of ignorance or blindness on my part, can lead into a broader understanding of Artaud's ideas. An exploration of my points of resistance opens the route towards an alternate reading of Artaud's writings. My reading of Artaud presents his antagonism towards language and the conscious mind, his paradoxical invocation of the literal and the figurative, as a performance of the desire to escape representative existence into a nonsignifying state, which may be tied to a desire for access to the unconscious. I read this desire as impossible. My reading may be correlated with Lacan's reading of the raw level of the unconscious, which he calls "the Real," as that which is neither symbolic nor imaginary, which is "impossible" because it is not accessible to us, since it is beyond the realm of language.[1] In this chapter I propose that my conclusion that the Real, the raw prefigurative state, is an impossibility, is a point of resistance on my part. As an alternative, I will examine authors who do not accept that this idea is impossible. Within Artaud, they read the desire for unrepresentative life as something which is possible. Among the writers whom I engage in this chapter, the most persuasive argument in favour of this theory which I have found is *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This book, substantially inspired by Artaud, posits that nonfigurative, nonsignifying, unrepresentative life is attainable. The exploration of the ideas in *Anti-Oedipus*, within whose context life is a theatre of representation, also serves as an introduction and bridge into the later chapters in this thesis, analyses of two plays which use their dramatic context to explore the idea of life as a theatre of representation, and portray characters who seek to escape figurative, signifying existence.

In the process of writing and rewriting, the author invariably overcomes and removes points of ignorance and resistance. Concerning the first chapter, I have done so many times. For example, at one point my analysis of Artaud's critique of logocentrism was blatantly logocentric. In an earlier draft I opened my discussion by revealing that I had got Artaud "right" and everyone else (except Derrida) had him "wrong." Like a character in "The Purloined Letter," I was blind to my error. I required a careful other reader[2] to point out my logocentrism to me, at which point I removed this point of resistance. However, there are two possible points of resistance which I perceive in the first chapter which remain there, because they are congruous to the structure of the chapter as a whole, rather than being inconsistencies which are destructive towards the logic of the writing.

The first point of resistance: In my brief discussion of Henry Louis Gates' term Signifyin(g) I deliberately did not mention that it is a literary concept applied exclusively by him to African-American narratives and linguistic concepts. Why did I leave that out? It is an intrinsic element of Gates' theory. Even though Gates deals exclusively with texts that are either written by African-Americans or dealing with African-American issues, he at one point notes that

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[1] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) x.

[2] In this situation my thesis supervisor, Dr. Debby Thompson.

> Signifyin(g), of course, is a principle of language use and is not in any way the exclusive province of black people, although blacks named the term and invented its rituals.[3]

Gates then goes on to describe racist broadsides by whites that Signified on blacks by parodying known black writings. Despite the above statement, within the context of Gates' book Signifyin(g) appears to be intrinsically entwined with issues relevant to race. Thus, my first thought which followed my connexion between Artaudian figuration and Signifyin(g) was that my study of Artaud was lacking what for Gates seemed to be (in his practise if not in the above quote) an important factor: the notion of language and race. However, I feel now that perhaps the premises upon which issues of race (and colonialism, which, in Gates' book, figures prominently as a constitutive element in the language of Signifyin(g)) are based are premises which may be similar to those which underlie Artaud's thought. An understanding of my resistance to the issues of race in *The Signifying Monkey* ties in closely with *Anti-Oedipus*. *Anti-Oedipus* correlates a close connexion between the process of desire in Artaud's writings, and the processes of desire within racially motivated political revolution and resistance. Key to this correlation is that Artaud's ideas are possible, which is contrary to what I conclude in Chapter one. To consider them possible gives them immediate political relevance, as is found in Gates' work. As Gates' theories are not just hermetically sealed linguistic concepts, but tools of political analysis relevant and practical within the context of general experience, so would be my analysis of Artaud. To accept the connexion between Artaud's ideas and the full context of Gates' ideas is to accept that Artaud's ideas are possible. Thus, my resistance towards the full context of Signifyin(g) appears to be an attempt to protect the conclusions I draw in Chapter one from falling apart.

My second point of resistance: Upon rereading Derrida's "La parole soufflée" I became uncomfortably cognizant of the discussion with which he opens his article, a subject of debate of which I make no mention whatsoever in my first chapter: a debate over the conflict between "clinical" and "critical" discourse, and how (perhaps) never the twain shall meet. Within Derrida's discussion are raised such issues as the idea of an "author," but added to the analysis is the issue of the mental health of this alleged "author." I found myself wondering why I avoid any mention or discussion of Artaud as "schizophrenic" or "madman" in my first chapter. Derrida does not consider

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[3] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 90.

Artaud's ideas as impossible, and key to Derrida's analysis is the factor of Artaud's schizophrenic condition. To invoke the issue of madness would involve a weakening of my argument. It seems that I avoid the discussion of madness because I want Artaud's ideas to be impossible, rational. It does not fit the thesis of my first chapter to consider Artaud's madness, but I will consider it here, and how it provokes a different, more difficult understanding of Artaud's work.

Derrida, in "La Parole Soufflée," focuses on exposing the flaws of interpretation in which critical and clinical discourse are complicit, specifically the tendency of both discourses to create examples, even though they arrive at this point from radically different directions. For Derrida, key to understanding the importance and possibility of Artaud's ideas is the achievement of a discourse which effaces both the binarism between madness (the experience) and the work, and the binarism between the unique and the exemplary. He criticizes the opinion of a number of writers in order to develop his argument. For Derrida, Artaud is paradoxically both unique and exemplary. Alan Thiher proposes that Derrida's essay refutes a reading of Artaud "as an exemplar of the tradition of mad poets"[4] and instead posits that

> Artaud takes us into a realm where metaphysics and madness mutually inhabit each other and where it can no longer be a question of the metaphysical exemplarity of essential examples - which is to say that Derrida refuses a transformation of Artaud as determined by the metaphysical structure of essence and exemplarity.[5]

What does it serve, Derrida posits, to approach a piece of writing as "schizophrenic?" The primary issue is an erasure of the tension, as Derrida sees it, between the unique and the universal. Derrida sees Artaud as an erasure of the split between the experience and the work.

Neither critical nor clinical discourse is capable of reading the schizophrenic experience/work, for both are caught up in the universal/unique binarism. Derrida's Blanchot stresses that Artaud's work should not be read as psychological analyses of his state. Blanchot claims that clinical analysis "misses the singularity of the event and masters every surprise in advance."[6] However, criticizing Blanchot's point of view, Derrida points out that "This reduction of the clinical reduction is an essentialist reduction." Through his critique of clinical study, Blanchot is guilty of doing that which he criticizes the medical community of doing. From Derrida's point of view, this illustrates a problem he defines in both clinical and critical discourse:

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[4] Alan Thiher, "Jacques Derrida's Reading of Artaud: 'La Parole soufflée' and 'La Clôture de la représentation,'" *The French Review* vol. LVII, no. 4 (March 1984): 504.

[5] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 505.

> At the moment when criticism (be it aesthetic, literary, philosophical, etc.) allegedly protects the meaning of a thought or the value of a work against psychomedical reductions, it comes to the same result [that a reduction would come to] through the opposite path: it creates an example. That is to say, a case.[7]

The tension, as far as Blanchot sees it, is one between the unique (the realm of literature and art - the critical, the work) and the universal (the realm of the clinical, and, in this case, of madness.) Derrida is not content to accept an irreconcilable tension between the subject and the work; he attempts to deconstruct the distinction between the two in order to show it to be false. His key tool is the transcendent experience of the schizophrenic. The schizoid writer Hölderlin, for Derrida, provides "access to the essence of schizophrenia in general," opening "the question of schizophrenia as a universal problem."[8] Derrida perceives within schizophrenic discourse a structure which deconstructs the opposition between unicity and exemplarity:

> Schizophrenia simply is not one among other attributes of an essence of man that would have to be constituted and acknowledged as the prerequisite basis of the study of man [...] schizophrenia is not one among other dimensions or possibilities of the existent called man, but indeed the structure that opens the truth of man. This opening is produced in an exemplary way in the case of Hölderlin. It could be thought that, by definition, the unique cannot be an example or case of a universal figure. But it can. Exemplarity only apparently contradicts unicity.[9]

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[6] Ibid., p. 172.

[7] Ibid., 170.

[8] Ibid., 173.

[9] Ibid., 173-4.

Derrida's words seem to want to define a new kind of discourse, which can be called neither critical nor clinical, and which reconciles the tension between the unique and the universal.

It is in Artaud that Derrida finds a challenging and hopeful subject, for, as Derrida writes, "Artaud teaches us this unity prior to dissociation." Derrida's Artaud is a teacher erasing the binarism between the unique and the exemplary,

> For what his howls promise us, articulating themselves under the headings of *existence, flesh, life, theater, cruelty* is the meaning of an art prior to madness and the work, an art which no longer yields work, an artist's existence which is no longer a route or an experience that gives access to something other than itself; Artaud promises the existence of a speech that is a body, of a body that is a theater...[10]

I hope that my first chapter illustrates well what Derrida describes here. Artaud seeks to escape representation. But I feel that Derrida seems to imply that Artaud does escape. What appears to me to be very important for Derrida's thesis is the implication that Artaud achieves this art prior to madness and the work:

> If Artaud absolutely resists - and, we believe, as was never done before - clinical or critical exegeses, he does so by virtue of that part of his adventure (and with this word we are designating a totality anterior to the separation of the life and the work) which is the very protest itself against exemplification itself. The critic and the doctor are without resource when confronted by an existence that refuses to signify, or by an art without works, a language without a trace. That is to say, without difference.[11]

Some sneaky business from Jacques. Derrida does not state that Artaud's existence refuses to signify, but the above quote definitely implies it. Artaud's "howls promise." "Artaud promises the existence of a speech that is a body." But a promise is not always kept. Artaud's "adventure" is a "protest" against the separation of life and work. But this does not mean that his adventure unites life and work. Derrida seems to want to elevate Artaud to the state of schizoid messiah. Derrida seems, through his tricky grammar, to try deliberately to confuse Artaud's promises with what Artaud actually does. I have already staked out my ground: Artaud's promises are purposefully impossible, and his attempt to fulfill them are deliberate, willed failures. He is as human as anyone else. Reading the above quotations, one could never criticize Derrida by saying "Hey, you claim that Artaud doesn't signify when he writes!" but at the same time Derrida seems to want us to go away thinking that is what he claims. He seems to be trying to lie to his reader. Can this be seen as a reflection of Artaud's own deceptive form of writing, in which his images are always drawing the reader away, either from what he may really mean, or from meaning altogether?

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[10] Ibid., 174.

[11] Ibid., 175.

Gilles Deleuze, like Derrida, presents a challenge to the analytic tension between madness and the work in his essay "The Schizophrenic and Language: Surface and Depth in Lewis Carroll and Antonin Artaud." Here again is a thesis which, antithetically to the conclusions which I draw, assumes the success of the challenge Artaud laid out for himself. For Deleuze the issue at stake when understanding Artaud is not a question of finding "truth" or the essence of matter, or such essentialist sentiments, but of escaping from such strictures altogether, into the nonsignifying underside of conscious thought. Deleuze believes that Artaud's writings experience unrepresentative thought - nonfigurative, nonsignifying states of existence. Deleuze compares the language of Lewis Carroll and Artaud so that he can emphasize that the language of the schizophrenic (Artaud, definitely not Carroll) is able to escape the strictures of signification and meaning:

> Carroll and Artaud are nonetheless different; at no point do their worlds coincide. Only the commentator can move from one dimension to the other, and that is his great weakness, the sign that he inhabits neither. We would not give one page of Antonin Artaud for all of Carroll: Artaud is the only person to have experienced absolute depth in literature, to have discovered a "vital" body and its prodigious language (through suffering, as he says.) He explored the infra-meaning, which today is still unknown.[12]

For Deleuze, schizoid language explores "the true problem of language in its depth - the schizophrenic problem of suffering, of death, and of life."[13] If we accept Deleuze's thesis that Artaud explored "infra-meaning," which I read as a term for the structure of meaning, the framework of signification, then I believe we accept that Artaud achieves his desire: nonfigurative, nonsignifying existence.

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[12] Gilles Deleuze, "The Schizophrenic and Language: Surface and Depth in Lewis Carroll and Antonin Artaud," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. and trans. Josué V. Harari. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979) 294-5.

In my own analysis of Artaud I proposed that his language managed to present simultaneously the literal and the figurative as a performative attempt to collapse the strictures of signification, of pigshit words. Deleuze instead proposes that Artaud's language is not merely performative, but effective. However, I am not comfortable with the argument Deleuze develops. He proposes that schizophrenic words have a duality, one aspect of which is two types of nonsense:

> The duality of schizophrenic words has not received adequate attention [... These are] the nonsense of words emptied of meaning, which decompose into phonetic elements, and the nonsense of tonic elements which form indecomposable words that are no less empty. In both these cases everything happens below meaning, far from the surface. [...] In both of its aspects, language is, to quote Hölderlin, "a sign empty of meaning." It is still a sign, but one that merges with an action or passion of the body. This is why it is insufficient to say that schizophrenic language is defined by an incessant and mad sliding of the signifying series onto the signified series. In fact, no series remains at all; both have disappeared.[14]

Within Artaud's writings, Deleuze posits, signs become independent of the absolute Absence which meaning always embodies. Deleuze here is speaking of certain examples of Artaud's writings which suit particularly well Deleuze's thesis; poems composed of words like "rourghe" and "rouarghe." I have already illustrated Artaud's belief that all communication is figurative, and thus free of fixed, intrinsic meaning. However, Deleuze posits that Artaud manages to achieve what I see as the impossible: communication which is not accessible to "meaning," which has no ties to the void behind language which is absolute truth. Whereas I claim that Artaud's writing may be read as both literal and figurative, Deleuze claims that it is neither. For me to attempt to carry Deleuze's thesis over to the writings contained in *The Theater and Its Double* would seem a stretch. Instead, my goal here is to illustrate that there is not really that much difference between the contents of *TD* and a word like "rouarghambde," and that nonsense language is another attempt (again, possibly failing) to realize the "promises" Artaud makes in *TD*.

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[13] Ibid., 280.

[14] Ibid., 291.

Whether or not a signifier can really be empty of meaning, thus exploring "infra-meaning," the structure of signification, or whether one can only attempt to create an empty signifier, and be doomed to fail, is a dilemma I am not entirely comfortable answering. Does not a signifier, by definition, have meaning? A signifier always signifies something, even if the something is not intrinsic or fixed, and can slide crazily. That stabilizing Absent presence of some meaning seems necessary. No meaning, and it is no longer a signifier. Deleuze's argument hinges on the idea that Artaud's nonsense words are fundamentally different from Carroll's "portmanteau" words. Artaud's "rouarghe"'s, Deleuze claims, arise from a sort of physical passion which is not mentally inspired. However, what confuses me is that when Deleuze uses words like "rouarghe" as an example, he stresses that at one point these words meant something:

> It is a question of turning the word into a consolidated, indecomposable mass of consonants by using soft signs. In this language one can always find equivalents for portmanteau words. For "rourghe" and "rouarghe" Artaud himself indicates ruee (onslaught), roue (wheel), route (route)...[15]

Deleuze then goes on to explain that these words "do not function on the same level" as portmanteau words, such as Carroll uses. Instead, Artaud's words

> bring about a chain of associations between tonic and consonantal elements, in a region of infra-meaning, according to a fluid and burning principle that absorbs or actually resorbs the meaning as it is produced.[16]

If the region of infra-meaning is, as Deleuze describes it, "unknown," then it seems he can only speculate about Artaud's success in touching this underlying space with his words. However, I fail to understand how Artaud's words achieve this raw state. Even if these are the decomposed remnants of signifiers, are they not in some way intrinsically tied with signification? Language is not a static system. Through time and other factors, words metamorphose and change in shape and meaning. Words in one language are distortions of words from another language. Artaud's nonsense words appear to be just as much decomposed signifiers as Carroll's. Deleuze stakes his argument on Artaud's disgust and repulsion with Carroll's poetry, particularly "Jabberwocky." Perhaps an alternative appreciation of the situation is that Artaud and Carroll had much more in common than Artaud felt comfortable acknowledging to himself. In both cases, their nonsense words are inspired and abstracted from recognized words and signifiers. Deleuze takes great pains to show the difference between them, but it all seems to hinge on the intentionality he assigns to Artaud, or more accurately, the presence of a lack of intentionality. I posit that he is guilty of imagining an author, or more accurately, a non-author, an absent presence, in Artaud's case. These nonsense words, I insist, are engaged in a rigorous shaking up and performative critique of the two axes of signification, axes which the words cannot escape. The region of "infra-meaning" is not accessible to language.

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[15] Ibid., 290.

[16] Ibid., 291.

Even though I seek to defend the alternative readings of Artaud which I have presented above, I remain unmoved by Derrida and Deleuze. Their arguments do not convince me that Artaud escapes the realm of signification. I am inclined to accept the psychoanalytic conceptions of language as described by Jacques Lacan, who proposes that the unconscious is structured like language, the chain of signification, and thus human thought will always remain within the parameters of signification. In the first chapter of this thesis I make reference to Henry Louis Gates' book *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates makes a specific endeavour to locate the language of Signifyin(g) on the symbolic chain of language, following the concepts of Ferdinand de Saussure, and later Jacques Lacan:

> The English-language use of signification refers to the chain of signifiers that configure horizontally, on the syntagmatic axis. Whereas signification operates and can be represented on a syntagmatic or horizontal axis, Signifyin(g) operates and can be represented on a paradigmatic or vertical axis. [...] Jacques Lacan calls these vertically suspended associations "a whole articulation of relevant contexts," by which he means all of the associations that a signifier carries from other contexts, which must be deleted, ignored, or censored "for this signifier to be lined up with a signified to produce a specific meaning." Everything that must be

> excluded for meaning to remain coherent and linear comes to bear in the process of Signifyin(g).[17]

Within Gates' context, the figurative language of Signifyin(g) constitutes the Other - the necessary present absence which holds up discourse. He contrasts this with metonymic meaning - the horizontal chain. However, as is discernable in my reading of Artaud, I do not accept Gates' binarism between metonymy and metaphor. I read in Lacan, as I read in Artaud, a blurring of the line between the literal and the figurative. Everything except the signifier is absent, as all communication is figurative. "Meaning" is just as much an absolute absence in metonymic language as in troping and punning.

An exploration of Jacques Lacan's theory of the signifying chain finds parallels between Lacan's work and Artaud's. The parallels serve to reinforce the argument I develop in chapter one. The seminar by Lacan that Gates quotes is "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud," which is translated in *Ecrits: A Selection*. Lacan's seminar is a critique of the location of the ego, a critique which uses the structure of language as a guide. In Lacan's theory the signifying chain of language has two axes, the vertical (which Lacan associates with metaphor, and Gates associates with Signifyin(g)) and the horizontal (which Lacan associates with metonymy, and Gates associates with signifying.) Upon closer examination of Lacan's seminar, which I supplement with Jane Gallop's reading of Lacan, the issue of vertical versus horizontal (or metaphor versus metonymy) is not as black and white as the above quote from Gates makes it out to be. Gallop problematizes the juxtaposition of metaphor and metonymy by exploring the nuances of Lacan's text. She also problematizes reading Lacan in general, positing that the problematization of understanding is what Lacan is trying to communicate in his work. Her reading is of a Lacan who performs within his text the concept that signifying in general (metonymic and metaphoric) is restrictive, and we can only desire to escape it.

All of this I invoke as a means of reading Artaud's work. For Lacan, the Real, the raw undifferentiated unfigurative unconscious, is not available to us. I see in Lacan's writings a reflection of what I observe in Artaud's work: words which address the problem of communicating through words. Lacan's approach to understanding the workings of the human mind hinges upon the ties between language and the unconscious. The paradox in Lacan's approach is that the psychoanalyst's tool is also language. Thus, the Lacanian psychoanalyst and a poet like

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[17] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 49-50.

Artaud immediately have much in common.

In Lacan's seminar there appears to be a stark contrast between the two axes of signification, metonymy and metaphor, the seemingly "literal" and the seemingly "figurative." Metonymy is "the properly signifying function thus depicted in language"[18] and is based on the "word-to-word connexion" which structures linear communication. However, metonymy is presented as paradoxical, since it is a means of allowing a free continuation of thought processes by the use of a restrictive and inflexible structure, which Lacan describes as

> no other derangement of instinct than that of being caught in the rails - eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else - of metonymy.[19]

Metonymy is enabling by being restraining, for it is complicit in the creation of the imaginary Other which our actions are directed towards. The wanting, the striving, the anticipation of meaning, are the oppression of metonymy, an oppression which allows language and thought. This, I propose, is precisely the void, the abyss, the Other which Artaud condemns vociferously in the poem "The Theatre of Cruelty." He observes acutely that the human mind is structured in a manner which always maintains, at the very edge of thought, the idea of Nothing as a presence. This is the restraining stricture of metonymy, which insidiously creeps up from the unconscious into language. "What the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language,"[20] and in an inverse manner, Artaud's attack on language seeps down through thought into the unconscious, waging a desperate and futile battle there as well. The mind is at odds with itself.

There seems a stark contrast between metonymy and metaphor. Artaud's use of figurative language is a counterattack that takes place along the "vertical" axis of signification, the same location where Signifyin(g) rejects the tradition of white american discourse. For Lacan, the vertical axis is the domain of metaphor, and the refuge of poets:

> The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the presentation of the two images, that is, of two signifiers equally actualized. It flashes

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[18] Lacan, 156.

[19] Ibid., 167.

[20] Ibid., 147.

> between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain.
>
> *One word for another*: that is the formula for the metaphor and if you are a poet you will produce for your own delight a continuous stream, a dazzling tissue of metaphors.[21]

The concept which is encompassed by Lacan's use of the word metaphor is more far-reaching than the commonplace use of the term would imply. Within the Lacanian context metaphor involves all aspects of language which are considered overtly figurative:

> What this structure of the signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have, precisely in so far as it exists as a language in common with other subjects, that is to say, in so far as it exists as a language, to use it in order to signify something quite other than what it says.[22]

Thus the idea of metaphor can be read as a means of troping as I describe it, and as is seen in Gates' *The Signifying Monkey*. If the vertical axis of signification functions through the occultation of "meaning" as a rejection of the metonymic restrictions of the concept of "truth," then Artaud's writings may be seen as an attempt to frustrate the very structure of thought, by pushing his words to the edge of the vertical axis, and as far away from "truth" as possible. The further into the vertical axis that his words venture, the further away they move from the restriction of the metonymic pursuit of the Other, the something else which Lacan's "rails of metonymy" pursue.

However, the aspects of Artaud's writings which I read as simultaneously literal and figurative I understand as engaged in a critical deconstruction of the two axes of signification, in order to reveal the complicity which metonymy and metaphor are always already engaged in. The argument I develop in chapter one, within the present context of the chain of signification, implies that for Artaud, there may be a complicity between metaphor and metonymy in that neither can be "literal." Yet his own language, through its use of words which demands both literal and figurative readings without privileging one or the other, appears to be an attempt to challenge the meaninglessness of "pigshit words" with language that attempts to touch the literal. Since they are words, they are doomed to fail. The complicity between the literal and the figurative is also discernable in Lacan's seminar. There could be no metaphor if metonymy did not come first. What for Artaud is an antagonistic conflict for Lacan is a deterministic contest:

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[21] Ibid., 157.

[22] Ibid., 155.

> This signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its exorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there.[23]

Whereas Artaud's critique of the Void, the absence which our thoughts are oriented towards, is a vehement attack, a performance of the attempt to escape, Lacan assumes a position of complacency, accepting that the search for meaning is a "game" whose match-point is never accessible to us.

The writings of both Artaud and Lacan seem to me to be engaged in a similar, paradoxical endeavour. As Artaud's seeming "goal" is frustrated by his need to use words to accomplish it, so Lacan's writing seems plagued with contradictions which frustrate closure. At the beginning of "The agency of the letter" Lacan asks

> And how could the psychoanalyst of today not realize that speech is the key to that truth [which the psychoanalyst seeks], when his whole experience must find in speech alone its instrument, its context, its material, and even the background noise of its uncertainties.[24]

Again, the similarities between his task and Artaud's are evident. Both are engaged in a critique of the structure of language through the use of language, resulting in an irreconcilable and paradoxical tension. Shoshana Felman observes that in Lacan's technique:

> the status of the poet is no longer that of the (sick) patient but, if anything, that of the analyst [...] the clear-cut opposition between madness and health, or between doctor and patient is unsettled by the odd functioning of the

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[23] Ibid., 166.

[24] Ibid., 147.

> purloined letter of the unconscious, which no one can possess or master. "There is no metalanguage," says Lacan: there is no language in which interpretation can itself escape the effects of the unconscious; the interpreter is no more immune than the poet to unconscious delusions and errors.[25]

The complicity of the intersubjective relation between analyst and analysand is correlative to the intersubjective relationship between a reader and a text.

The parallels between Lacan and Artaud are most evident in Gallop's analysis of metonymy and metaphor in "The agency of the letter," where she reads Lacan's subtle erasure of the distinction between the two modes of discourse, with the eventual determination that metatextual discussion is not actually possible. Like Artaud, Gallop's Lacan sees both metonymy and metaphor as figurative. Her study of Lacan problematizes "The agency of the letter." She observes that Lacan seems to provide two contradictory ideas in the seminar, one which is obvious, and when scrutinized fallacious, and one which is more difficult to discern, but stands up to close scrutiny.

Gallop proposes that the sharp distinction between metaphor and metonymy (and also Lacan's seeming privileging of metaphor), which are easily located within the text, is a deluded reading of the complex seminar:

> The text seems to supply two contradictory readings, a first, easier one that privileges the vertical, and another that shows that the privilege of the vertical is actually a confusion of the vertical with a nonlinear configuration that is both vertical and horizontal. And if the privilege of the vertical is wedded to the preference for metaphor, then a recognition of the two dimensions of the + suggests that metonymy is necessary for metaphor. Exactly one year before the lecture to the étudiants ès lettres, in his seminar of May 9, 1956, Lacan insists that "metonymy is there from the beginning, and it is what makes metaphor possible."[26]

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[25] Shoshana Felman, "On Reading Poetry: Reflections on the Limits and Possibilities of Psychoanalytic Approaches," in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) 152.

[26] Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 124.

If metonymy is always present first, then it is an intrinsic aspect of metaphor. Gallop's interest in metonymy is based on its psychoanalytic association with the Void, the Lack which Lacan defines as oppressive. For Gallop, metonymy, linked by Lacan to realism, is further linked to femininity through its relation to the lack - the psychoanalytic concept of castration. Critical as she is of this association, her own writing attempts a metonymic critique of the association of feminity and absence.

Gallop's critical correlation between metonymy, lack and femininity is a connexion which Artaud makes with vitriolic lucidity. He describes in "The Theatre of Cruelty,"

> the ignominious sow
> of the illusory universal
> who with her slobbering udders
> has never concealed anything from us
> except Nothingness. [27]

As a result of his attack on metonymy and the Void, the feminine also seems to suffer disparagement. His vehement criticism of the Void may be read as a rejection of the learning of difference between the parents, a difference which in psychoanalysis is formative of the desire for the absolute absence which underlies thought. This connexion between lack and femininity complements the association between presence (the Phallus) and the masculine. These associations are historical, and are connexions which Gallop herself is elsewhere critical of. She writes in *Thinking Through the Body:*

> In my interest in the distinction between phallus and penis, I began to notice that whenever any Lacanian set out to clear up the confusion between phallus and penis, she or he inevitably fell into the same sort of confusion the effort was meant to remedy. I do not pretend to be able to escape this confusion myself. I believe it to be a symptom of the impossibility, at this moment in our history, to think a masculine that is not phallic, a masculine that can couple with a feminine. Yet I consider that very impossibility to be nonetheless an urgent necessity - it is urgently necessary to think a masculine that is not phallic, to think a sexuality that is not arrested in the phallic phase.[28]

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[27] Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts* 83.

[28] Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* 127.

Following Gallop's lead, I propose that at the same time as it is necessary to think a masculine that is not phallic, it is necessary to conceive of a feminine that is not castrated. Despite the seeming mysogyny in Artaud's poem, I read his words as a critique of the association of the Void (lack, castration) and femininity. Artaud calls this association "a story." When he writes, in the same poem

> (It is not especially a question of the penis or
> the anus
> which should moreover be cut off and got rid of,
> but of the top of the thighs,
> of the hips,
> of the loins,
> of the entire sexless stomach
> and of the navel.)[29]

the words become, in my reading, a figurative critique of phallic associations within the realm of human desire. Attacking the dominant structures of human thought, Artaud asks "who has ever tested other than on the plane of sexual life/ the incommensurable abilities of the appetites?"[30] as a means of describing the yearning for desire freed of objects, images, whether they be phallic or castrated. Like Gallop, Artaud asks for sexuality to be conceived of without phallic associations.

Gallop examines Lacan's supposed privileging of metaphor and determines that

> Lacan's preference for metaphor and verticality may be an "illusion," but it is one to which we all fall "victim." It is an "eternal temptation," which is to say, we cannot ever be safe from its lures. If this temptation, with its "captivating" illusions, belongs to the imaginary order, then we cannot get beyond it by refusing it but must [...] fall for and contemplate these illusions so as to get at what is structuring them.[31]

Within this context Gallop sees Lacan's writings as an example and a model of behaviour for his reader to scrutinize and be critical of. In Gallop's reading, Lacan's seminar is a performance with a hidden meaning. As Artaud resists the privileging of either metaphor or metonymy, embracing a mode of discourse which attempts to deconstruct the binarism between the literal and the figurative, so Lacan demonstrates a similar activity in his own writing, according to Gallop. Both Artaud and Lacan end up erasing the schism between metonymy and metaphor. Lacan performs the attempt to escape metonymy through the privileging of figurative language, and, failing, his performance reveals that all language involves a complicity of the literal and the figurative.

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[29] Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Four Texts* 86.

[30] Ibid., 84.

[31] Gallop, *Reading Lacan* 128.

Crucial to consider here is that Gallop posits that it is not the privileging of metaphor which dooms the endeavour, but the privileging itself. Gallop's reading of metaphor and metonymy does not exclude her from the subject of her analysis. She chooses to attempt a privileging of metonymy in her reading of Lacan's seminar, and concludes that

> A metonymic reading construes metonymy as phallic whereas a metaphoric interpretation attributes the phallus to metaphor. Either sort of reading inevitably locates the phallus in its own narcissistic reflection in the text. What we may be approaching here is some sort of pathology of interpretation [...] As I have progressively moved into and privileged a metonymic reading, I have suffered greater and greater difficulty in maintaining metalanguage [...] Any polar opposition between metaphor and metonymy (vertical versus horizontal, masculine versus feminine) is trapped in the imaginary order, subject to the play of identification and rivalry.[32]

The illusion we succumb to in order to structure discourse is that literal meaning is possible, a belief which involves the establishment of a binarism between metonymy and metaphor. The illusion we succumb to in order to attempt to escape signification is that all language is figurative, which implicates the same binarism. The concluding effacement of the binarism between metonymy and metaphor indicates that all three subjects, Artaud, Lacan and Gallop, through their performative critique of language, become cognizant that the restraints of the signifying chain cannot be escaped.

My comparison of Artaud with the psychoanalytic experience as exemplified by Lacan and Gallop addresses the general issue of the psychoanalytic reading of texts in general. It is convenient for me to define Artaud and these psychoanalysts in a context together, as it reinforces my reading of Artaud's texts. Key to my parallelism is the structuring of the unconscious according to the law of the signifier. It is due to this correlation that I am able to use psychoanalytic theory to bolster my argument concerning Artaud.

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[32] Ibid., 131-2.

However, Deleuze and Guattari, the authors of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, do not accept this comfortable connexion between signification and the unconscious. The book posits that Artaud's method, which they call schizoanalysis, is opposed in all its aspects to the methods of psychoanalysis. *Schizoanalysis*: The term is meant to be read as a deliberate and overt attack on every aspect of psychoanalytic method, which the authors posit is a process which nurtures neurosis rather than breaking it down:

> The fundamental difference between psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis is the following: schizoanalysis attains a nonfigurative and nonsymbolic unconscious, a pure abstract figural dimension ("abstract" in the sense of abstract painting), flow-schizzes or real-desire, apprehended below the minimum conditions of identity.[33]

Anti-Oedipus posits that Artaud communicates the nonfigurative unconscious. I propose that Artaud's language is a critique of language, a critique which is both figurative and literal. The raw unconscious, claims *Anti-Oedipus*, is neither. Deleuze and Guattari do not claim to create schizoanalysis, but rather coin the term to describe what they observe in action in the writings of Artaud and others. Their concept of the unconscious as a machine of flowing, pure, unterritorialized, nonrepresentative desire is key to their theory that Artaud's desires are attainable. The deterritorialized flows

> do not derive from a signifier nor are they even signs as minimal elements of the signifier; they are nonsigns, or rather nonsignifying signs, points-signs having several dimensions, flow-breaks or schizzes that form images through their coming together in a whole, but that do not maintain any identity when they pass from one whole to another.[34]

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[33] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 351.

[34] Ibid., 241.

At the raw, Real state, our unconsciouses are pure "desiring-machines [...which] represent nothing, signify nothing, mean nothing, and are exactly what one makes of them, what is made with them, what they make in themselves."[35] Their concept of the unconscious desiring-machines makes possible a theory of a schizoanalytic method within Artaud's writings. For them, The Real is not impossible.

Anti-Oedipus takes up a position which reflects strongly upon Derrida's, attempting to elevate Artaud to the position of schizoid Oracle. Schizophrenia, according to Deleuze and Guattari, provides a voicepiece for nonsignifying existence:

> But some reply: Artaud does not belong to the realm of literature, he is outside it because he is schizophrenic. Others retort: he is not schizophrenic, since he belongs to literature, and the most important literature at that, the textual. Both groups hold at least one thing in common; they subscribe to the same puerile and reactionary conception of schizophrenia, and the same marketable neurotic conception of literature. A shrewd critic writes: one need understand nothing of the concept of the signifier "in order to declare absolutely that Artaud's language is that of a schizophrenic; the psychotic produces an involuntary discourse, fettered, subjugated: therefore in all respects the contrary of textual writing." But what is this enormous textual archaism, the signifier, that subjects literature to the mark of castration and sanctifies the two aspects of its Oedipal form? And who told this shrewd critic that the discourse of the psychotic was "involuntary, fettered, subjugated"? Not that it is more nearly the opposite, thank God. But these very oppositions are singularly lacking in relevance. Artaud makes a shambles of psychiatry, precisely because he is schizophrenic and not because he is not. Artaud is the fulfillment of literature, precisely because he is schizophrenic and not because he is not. It has been a long time since he broke down the wall of the signifier: Artaud the Schizo.[36]

Artaud is possible, and this is because of how he wrecks the binarism between experience and the work. Key to this method is his schizophrenia, which causes him to fall outside the parameters of psychoanalysis and literature. Neither discipline can "get" him, and thus, like me, both call him impossible, "mad." But *Anti-Oedipus* does not think he is impossible. For Deleuze and Guattari, Artaud's writings demonstrate a successful attack on the restraining rule of the signifier, and further, an erasure of the distinction between the experience and the work. By refusing to complacently accept the shackles of fixed meaning and signification, by attacking the repetitive restraints of language by using language which refuses representation, Artaud, according to the authors, refuses understanding through psychoanalytic modes. Artaud's techniques further refuse to pay lip-service to the Void, the Lack, the mark of Castration which psychoanalysis attempts to stamp on humans as a universal attribute. Desiring-machines "lack nothing."[37] The unconscious knows nothing of psychoanalytic codings:

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[35] Ibid., p. 288.

[36] Ibid., 134-5.

> The unconscious is not figurative, since its figural is abstract, the figure-schiz. It is not structural, nor is it symbolic, for its reality is that of the Real in its very production, in its very inorganization. It is not representative, but solely machinic, and productive.[38]

Artaud's method, this schizoanalysis, is the decoding and deterritorialization of thought in pursuit of the Real, the nonfigurative unconscious, the desiring-machines.

René Girard, operating from the point of view of a literary critic who privileges art over all clinical examinations, is highly critical of *Anti-Oedipus*. All the same, his understanding of the text is impressive, and he summarizes the basic issues in a workable manner:

> Deleuze and Guattari place the Oedipus complex on the side of repression as if it were its displaced representative [...] The Oedipus complex is reduced to the level of "resistance." And what it resists is "true" desire, a multivalent and polyvocal force foreign to the demands of representation and imprisonment in structures. This desire is defined in terms of a flux cutting other fluxes, thereby deliminating "partial objects" - which in the first place are improperly named because they are not taken from "whole persons" but rather precede them. "True" desire

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[37] Ibid., 295.

[38] Ibid., 311.

> is unconscious. What we perceive as such at the level of "whole persons" is the result of complex operations, frayages, and codings that change its regime and increasingly set desire against itself, inscribing it first on the body of the earth and primitive societies, then on the body of the despot, and finally on capital in modern society. This last inscription gives rise to a wide-spread decoding that society perpetually seeks to thwart with "archaic recodings," such as the Oedipus complex. In order to "domesticate" a less and less coded desire, psychoanalysts unflaggingly return it to the "eternal triangle" and put all our dreams and desires through the "Oedipal meat grinder."
>
> If true desire is unconscious and still crushed in repressive codings, even in capitalism, how do the two authors know it exists? It is especially the delirious forms of schizophrenia that inform them, since these forms explode suppression in order to free true desire. In this delirium, all effective attitudes, all structural positions, all conceivable and inconceivable identifications appear juxtaposed [...] Delirium can thus serve as a weapon against analytic formalism.[39]

Intrinsic to the whole argument of *Anti-Oedipus* is the revelations to be found in the writings of individuals like Artaud, who are branded "schizophrenic" by society. From Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari, like Derrida, draw the concept of the "Body without Organs" - an idea which the schizophrenic radiates towards as a shutting down of the coding and territorialization of pure desire which occurs in our neurotic society. The BwO is "the body without an image," a manifestation of the urge to arrest altogether the flow and flux of desire by denying all representations, links, associations, by rejecting the Oedipal triangular neurosis, and by rejecting the ego, which is viewed as another neurotic territorialization imposed on pure desiring production. Thusly Deleuze and Guattari read the desires present in Artaud's poems:

> The body is the body,
> it is alone
> and needs no organs,

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[39] René Girard, "Delirium as System," in "*To Double Business Bound": Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 84.

> the body is never an organism,
> organisms are the enemies of the body,
> the things which one does
> get by all alone
> without the help of any organ,
> every organ is a parasite,
> it conceals a parasitic function
> intent on making a being live,
> which should not be there.[40]

In *Anti-Oedipus* the authors present the Body Without Organs as an image of the self freed of representation. They describe it as the goal which Artaud's writing seeks. In my reading of Artaud, I propose that a nonsignifying existence is not possible. I am critical of Deleuze and Guattari, because they seem to me to promise unrepresentative existence as the reward for understanding their complex book, yet I see nowhere a fulfillment of this promise. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the "sequel" to *Anti-Oedipus*, qualifies the concept of the Body Without Organs:

> [The Body without Organs] is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body Without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit [...] On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight - fight and are fought - seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love.[41]

The qualification of the Body without Organs, the unrepresentative state of existence exemplified by schizophrenic desire, as an always wanted, never attainable limit, places it within the realm of the anticipated Other. *Anti-Oedipus*, within this context, becomes a performance of the yearning for absence as something which is always just beyond our reach. This correlates closely with my reading of Artaud. I propose that *Anti-Oedipus*, in its romanticization of "Artaud the Schizo," ends up falling into the same blind trap which I read is performed in Artaud's writings.

Despite my criticism of the text, I find much of value in it. *Anti-Oedipus* correlates a highly political element to this theory of schizoanalysis, which I wish to examine so that I may critique the positive and negative implications of the authors' correlation between the BwO and revolutionary desire. The schizoid move towards the BwO is described as a reaction against neurotic codings such as Oedipal triangulation and colonial oppression. The authors posit that these neurotic codings are a reaction only found within the Capitalistic socius. Why? Because capitalism is a machine which engages in the deterritorialization of socially coded desire, and then the inscription of that decoded desire onto circulating capital. Libidinal flows are physically channeled into the shape of money. It is within the argument of Deleuze and Guattari's book that I discover one motivation for moving from Artaud, in the last chapter, to Genet and shange in the next chapters. My first reasons for writing about *The Screens* and *spell #7* were based on the correlation between Artaud's critique of self, and the critical ontological representations of self seen in these two plays. In this sense, I felt that the writings of all three authors express common themes. I was aware that both plays dealt with political issues of colonialism and racism, but I did not perceive a direct relevance between those matters and Artaud's concerns. *Anti-Oedipus* attempts to draw direct relations between the process of schizophrenia and social resistance to colonialism. However, keeping in mind that the BwO is a limit, yearned for but never touched, I question what the correlation between schizoid desire and resistance to colonialism implies for the socially oppressed. To propose that the desire to resist fascistic codings and oppressions is a desire for an absent limit is an implication which I have difficulty accepting. In my examination of *The Screens* and *spell #7* I will examine how these two plays deal critically with this idea.

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[40] Artaud, *Artaud On Theatre* 173.

[41] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 150.

For Deleuze and Guattari, there is no elemental distinction to be made between the libidinal flow of desire and the flow of capital in a capitalistic society. Pure desire, socially coded and territorialized into neurotic channels, associated with objects by the conscious mind, undergoes a unique metamorphosis in the mechanism of capitalism:

> Capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money. Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement

> that drives it toward this limit. At capitalism's limit the deterritorialized socius gives way to the body without organs, and the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production.[42]

The flow of desire is turned into the flow of money in the machine of capitalism. Capitalism's decoding of desire and the inscription of decoded desire onto capital is subjected to the neurotic recodings exemplified by Oedipal triangulation, psychoanalysis and colonialism. Capitalism is thus intrinsically tied to the fascistic encoding and territorialization. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that the Oedipus complex does not exist in pre-capitalistic societies, because Oedipus is the fullest manifestation of archaic, fascistic reterritorialization and recoding, as found only in a capitalistic deterritorializing socius.

Colonial desire is a prominent manifestation of "archaic recodings" that capitalistic decoding prompts. In social terms, this is evident to Deleuze and Guattari in the example of colonial imperialism:

> The colonizer, for example, abolishes the chieftainship, or uses it to further his own ends (and he uses many other things besides: the chieftainship is only a beginning). The colonizer says: your father is your father and nothing else, or your maternal grandfather - don't mistake them for chiefs; you can go have yourself triangulated in your corner, and place your house between those of your paternal and maternal kin; your family is your family and nothing else [...] We have seen, however, that the colonized remained a typical example of resistance to Oedipus: in fact, that's where the Oedipal structure does not manage to close itself, and where the terms of the structure remained stuck to the agents of oppressive social reproduction, either in a struggle or in a complicity: the White man, the missionary, the tax collector, the exporter of goods, the person standing in the village who becomes the agent of the administration, the elders who curse the white man, the young people who enter into a political struggle, etc. Both are true: the colonized resists oedipalization, and oedipalization tends to close around him again.[43]

The colonizer's desire is to neurotically encode other cultures. The resistance of the colonized is a resistance to neurotic territorialization, and thus has a close correlation with the resistance to neurotic, Oedipal inscription which Artaud expresses. Further, resistance to colonialism is described in the above quote as a limit which is constantly being reached for, never attained. The "struggle" is a constant, self-constituting one, a correlative to the striving for the BwO. For Deleuze and Guattari, the correlation between colonialism and Oedipal neurosis is a matter of scale:

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[42] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 139-40.

[43] Ibid., 168-9.

> There or here, it's the same thing: Oedipus is always colonization pursued by other means, it is the interior colony, and we shall see that even here at home, where we Europeans are concerned, it is our intimate colonial education.[44]

This is more than mere parallelism. *Anti-Oedipus* proposes that these are fundamentally identical situations, separated only by scale and external appearance. Artaud's schizoanalytic method is thus applicable to the colonialist neurotic inscriptions. The schizoanalytic method is an anti-colonialist method.

As a result of the above correlation, the authors perceive within Artaud's writings anti-colonial measures at work on the individual scale:

> The first things to be distributed on the body without organs are races, cultures, and their gods. The fact has often been overlooked that the schizo indeed participates in history; he hallucinates and raves universal history, and proliferates the races. All delirium is racial, which does not necessarily mean racist. It is not a matter of the regions of the body without organs "representing" races and cultures. The full body does not represent anything at all. [...]
>
> The crossing of a threshold entails ravages elsewhere - how could it be otherwise? The body without organs closes round the deserted places. The theater of cruelty cannot be separated from the struggle against our culture, from the confrontation of the "races," and from Artaud's great migration toward Mexico, its forces, and its religions.[45]

Anti-Oedipus conceives of the Theatre of Cruelty as being intrinsically tied to the process of schizoanalysis and its political facets. The Theatre of Cruelty is to be thought of as both a process and a goal: unrepresentation. *Anti-Oedipus'* motivation for including the Theatre of Cruelty within the subject of colonialism is most evident in the second manifesto in *TD*, wherein Artaud describes the scenario for *The Conquest of Mexico*:

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[44] Ibid., 170.

[45] Ibid., 85.

> From the historic point of view, *The Conquest of Mexico* poses the question of colonization. It revives in a brutal and implacable way the ever active fatuousness of Europe. [...] By broaching the alarmingly immediate question of colonization and the right one continent thinks it has to enslave another, this subject questions the real superiority of certain races over others and shows the inmost filiation that binds the genius of a race to particular forms of civilization. It contrasts the tyrannical anarchy of the colonizers to the profound moral harmony of the as yet uncolonized.[46]

Following Artaud, *Anti-Oedipus* proposes its own concept of the Theatre of Cruelty. It conceives of coded, territorialized existence as a theatre of representation. The goal of the process of schizoanalysis is

> not a promised and a pre-existing land, but a world created in the process of its tendency, its coming undone, its deterritorialization. The movement of the theater of cruelty; for it is the only theater of production, there where the flows cross the threshold of deterritorialization and produce the new land - not at all a hope, but a simple "finding," a "finished design," where the person who escapes causes other escapes, and marks out the land while deterritorializing himself.[47]

The Theatre of Cruelty is process as well, like resistance to colonialism, like the desire for the BwO. However, if *Anti-Oedipus* is a performance of the yearning for the BwO, then I propose that The Theatre of Cruelty, according to Anti-Oedipus, is a limit. The Body without Organs, existence without representation, always remains a limit. All these theoreticians either accept, or are tripped up by, their yearning for that which we will always reach for. Their concept of the Theatre of Cruelty is, I propose, fundamentally the same as the one I propose in chapter one. *Anti-Oedipus*, despite its proposition that the Theatre of Cruelty is possible to achieve, never explains how to fulfill that promise.

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[46] Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* 126-7.

[47] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 322.

In their correlation between anti-colonialist, revolutionary desire and schizophrenic desire there is an important differentiation to be discerned: "Finally, we do not at all think that the revolutionary is schizophrenic or vice versa [...] The schizophrenic process (the schizoid pole) is revolutionary, in the very sense that the paranoiac method is reactionary and fascist."[48] The schizoid process is revolutionary because the unterritorialized flows of desire are revolutionary in the extreme - the free flow of desire will always destroy all coding, structure and organization. And the schizophrenic process works to decode and deterritorialize desire;

> Desire, the desert-desire, the revolutionary investment of desire. And that is indeed what undermines capitalism: where will the revolution come from, and in what form within the exploited masses? It is like death - where, when? It will be a decoded flow, a deterritorialized flow that runs too far and cuts too sharply, thereby escaping from the axiomatic of capitalism. Will it come in the person of a Castro, an Arab, a Black Panther, or a Chinaman on the horizon? A May '68, a home-grown Maoist planted like an anchorite on a factory smokestack? Always the addition of an axiom to seal off a breach that has been discovered; fascist colonels start reading Mao, we won't be fooled again; Castro has become impossible, even in relation to himself; vacuoles are isolated, ghettos created; unions are appealed to for help; the most sinister forms of "dissuasion" are invented; the repression of interest is reinforced - but where will the new irruption of desire come from?[49]

In a circular manner I find myself returning to Henry Louis Gates and the concept of Signifyin(g), and I now have a clearer understanding of why there is a connexion between Artaud's style, and the literary modes defined in *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates provides a possible response to the question asked in the above quote. For Gates, Signifyin(g) represents a highly subversive and effective rejection of colonial territorialization of the Other:

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[48] Ibid., 379-80.

[49] Ibid., 378.

> What we are privileged to witness here is the (political, semantic) confrontation between two parallel discursive universes: the black American linguistic circle and the white [...] we bear witness here to a protracted argument over the nature of the sign itself, with the black vernacular discourse proffering its critique of the sign as the difference that blackness makes within the larger political culture and its historical unconscious.[50]

Deleuze and Guattari posit that desire will always find new ways of derailing fascism and disrupting the inscribing codes, yet I read, throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, the suggestion that the desire for freedom from fascistic inscriptions is a desire for a never attainable limit. Gates explains one new way in which rewriting of signification happens: a desiring revolution occurring within language:

> This political offensive could have been mounted against all sorts of standard English terms - and, indeed, it was. I am thinking here of terms such as down, nigger, baby, and cool, which snobbishly tend to be written about as "dialect" words or "slang." There are scores of such revised words. But to revise the term signification is to select a term that represents the nature of the process of meaning-creation and its representation. Few other selections could have been so dramatic, or so meaningful. We are witnessing here a profound disruption at the level of the signifier.[51]

It is perhaps possible that the strength of Signifyin(g) is that it is an unstoppable appropriative decoding of white american language. Even discovered, this breach in the territorialization cannot be sealed off by vacuoles, ghettos or sinister forms of disuassion without ending communication altogether.

After drawing this conclusion, I find, in Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, a brief correlation with my observation. The authors define "minor literature" as the literature "which a minority constructs within a major language."[52] The language of a "minor literature" is, above all, infused with language "affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization." The example they give of a deterritorialized language is Prague German, but they provide as a supplementary example: "This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language."[53] I would like to rewrite the idea that deterritorialization cannot ever achieve its goal. I resist the idea that resistance is doomed to be a neverending process. In the next chapters of this thesis, I consider two plays which manipulate language and signification in order to disrupt the order of the signifier and subvert colonial hegemony.

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[50] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* 45.

[51] Ibid., 47.

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[52] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature,* trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986) 16.

[53] Ibid., 17.

CHAPTER THREE: READING *THE SCREENS* BY JEAN GENET

Cruel theatre; cruel life. At the limit defined by the Theatre of Cruelty, the line between theatre and life seems thin. My desire to explore critics whose theories promise the realization of the Body without Organs, the activation of the Theatre of Cruelty, is frustrated by their failures to deliver on their promises. They reveal the desire for Cruel theatre as an untouchable limit. My own reading of Artaud is inclined to concur along with these writings that the Theatre of Cruelty is an Absence that can only be desired. However, Artaud himself, unlike the critics I looked at in the last chapter, did not ever concede that the Theatre of Cruelty was unattainable. It continued to remain, for him, a necessity.

A Theatre of Unrepresentation may not be possible, but the possibility remains of exploring the performative nature of existence in actual performance. In this chapter I read *The Screens* by Jean Genet as a dramatization of life as a Theatre of Representation, where the yearning for nonsignifying existence is portrayed as a limit, never attainable. In a sense, I read *The Screens* as a performance of the movement towards the limit defined by the Theatre of Cruelty. In this play the desire to escape representative existence is opened up to include social and political facets of existence. *The Screens'* portrayal of the desire for nonsignifying existence as a yearning is one which the receiver can relate to in a direct and relevant manner, in contrast with Artaud's writings, which always remain complex and confusing.

The title of *The Screens* refers first of all to the set of the play, a series of large screens, some white, some coloured, some with illustrations on them. These screens provide the physical set, the backdrop of the play; the narrative background of the play is the Algerian war for self-determination, waged against France. The conflict, spanning the 1950's, technically ended in 1961 and official independence was granted to Algeria in 1962. The play, in my reading, does not deal with the actual political situation in Algeria during this war. The setting is "Algeria," if one wishes to read literally. However, I read the colonialism in the play figuratively and literally. If this play is about colonialism, it is also about existence in general. The play promotes the idea that to conceive of colonialism as a local phenomenon is to fail to understand its universal effects. Genet's play is huge in scope, foregrounding against the backdrop of colonial resistance the story of the impoverished thief Saïd, his Mother, and his hooded (and allegedly "ugly") wife Leila. Surrounding this Arab family is a huge cast of characters, ranging from Algerian whores to French soldiers and citizens of all types and castes.

As sprawling as the play is, the plot is tenuous and elusive. What emerges as foremost in importance are the individual situations of the characters, and the unusual and paradoxical states of existence which they maintain. The story focuses primarily on the character of Saïd, who purposely betrays the Algerian cause, and in doing so becomes, paradoxically, an inspiration to the Arabs. Saïd attempts, through his actions in the play, to avoid inclusion in any side of the conflict, only to discover that his attempts to do so make him a sort of anti-hero to his own people, who decide that their only hope is to embrace "evil," of which Saïd is the perfect symbol. Saïd's actual absence throughout most of the second half of the play causes the characters who are present increasingly to focus their attention upon him. They anticipate his return, causing the presence of his absence to become the central focus of everyone's attention. *The Screens'* manipulation of ontological representations eventually becomes the primary focus of this epic drama, and the climax of the play involves the attempts of both the Algerian soldiers and the Algerian chaoticians to fashion Saïd into a "flag," a representation which "means" only what the Arabs want it to, the creation of a symbol which may nullify Saïd's own existence.

Along the way to this challenging statement about ontology and representation *The Screens* makes many stops. The play presents a wealth of characters who exist in many different modes of dramatic representation. *The Screens* is a vast, tapestry-like study of ontology under the thrall of colonial oppression. Using the trope of "colonialism," the play establishes statements about existence in general, and it is upon Genet's varying representations of identity and self that my study focuses. Close scrutiny of Genet's sprawling theatre text reveals that an attempt to understand the plot or the story of *The Screens* will inevitably be frustrated by narrative inconsistency and contradiction, and a seeming lack of concern on the part of the narrative for tying up the plot points. Indeed, it appears that the play purposefully violates the "rules" of good playwrighting. The subject of my analysis is the characters, and the play's attention to the problematizing of the parameters which we normally associate with the "subject."

The second scene of *The Screens* introduces the brothel, and two characters, Warda and Malika, who serve as representative examples of how existence in *The Screens* is both functionally "real," and a self-constituted "construction." Warda has been a prostitute for many years, and has raised the vocation to an art form and a definition of existence. It takes a lot of work: "A whore's not something you can improvise. She has to ripen. It took me twenty-four years. And I'm gifted!"[1] Their appearance and costume have a crucial part to play in the constitution of their identities. For these women, their actions and physical appearance become definitions of their selves. To be a whore is an involved performance, which for these women is focused mostly on the surface appearance, on externals. It is a performance of the self for oneself. There appears to be a danger inherent to being a whore for so many years:

> MUSTAPHA (gravely): In order to see you I come from the phosphate mines. I see you, it's you I believe in, the more you clothe, the more you plaster yourself...
> WARDA: My outfits! Underneath, there's not much left...
> MUSTAPHA (coming a step closer): What if death were there...
> WARDA (stopping him with a gesture): It's there. Quietly at work.[2]

Twenty-four years of prostitution leaves one a hollow shell of clothing and makeup, surrounding emptiness. After many years of defining herself according to how she constituted her appearance, all that is left Warda is this appearance, she has come to be the shell with which she clothed herself. Her identity consists of the makeup and costume which she constructed in order to attract men. She has become her self-constituted performance. Her language may also be read figuratively as referring to the wearing down of her body that comes with age and the hazards of her career. Whether or not the characters are speaking figuratively when they say things like "Underneath, there's not much left..." does not seem possible to determine. Warda is functionally valid, tangible, seemingly "real," yet she also has an intrinsically performative element to her existence. She is "Real" and "Constructed" in both figurative and literal senses. Paradoxically, her reality is performatively constructed. In some ways this is a private performance, raising the question of how necessary a viewer is for the performative constitution of the self. In other ways this is a performance for others. Figuratively "constructing" themselves as the idealized objects of male sexual desire, the two women eventually become this construction, in both a literal and figurative manner.

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[1] Jean Genet, *The Screens*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1962) 19.

[2] Ibid., 22.

In this early scene in *The Screens* Genet immediately manipulates theatrical conventions in order to portray existence as a Theatre of Representation. Artaud's use of the "fact" of the body, as I describe in Chapter One, is reflected in Genet's use of the dynamics of the stage, and specifically the presence of the actor's body on stage, to undermine the stability of identity and selfhood. These characters, Warda and Malika, consciously "read" their bodies and describe their bodies in a figurative manner. A figure, an image, implies a lack of essence, of "truth" perhaps. However, the body always remains real, precedent to readings and figurations. The Body remains "literal;" it is what it is. The use of the word "literal" complicates the matter, since the linguistic sense of the "literal" is also figurative. In this, a dramatic performance, the actual, physical presence of the actor's body, establishes a concrete, real parameter, which these characters seek to undermine through their own figurative readings of themselves, readings which serve to constitute their natures as constructions. Existence becomes established in *The Screens* as a performative paradox.

Performative paradoxes permeate *The Screens*. The paradoxes foreground how actual social existence, in many different ways, is a performative constitution. The play presents a complex image of the military and war in general as a performative constitution of identity. The deconstruction of the ideological structure of the military is engaged in Scene thirteen, where the french General is shot and killed. Moments before, the Lieutenant instructs his men in proper military behaviour:

> Let every man be a mirror to every other man. A pair of legs must look at themselves and see themselves in the pair of legs opposite, a torso in the torso opposite, the mouth in another mouth, the eyes in the eyes, the nose in the nose, the teeth in the teeth, the knees in the knees [...] Must look at oneself there and see oneself there supremely handsome.... (He about-faces in military fashion and speaks, facing the audience.) ... utterly seductive. And let the three-faced mirrors keep multiplying, the ten-faced, the thirteen, the hundred-thirteen, the thousand, the hundred-thousand! Let the profiles reflect profiles back and forth and let the image you offer the rebels be of such beauty that the image thay have of themselves cannot resist. Conquered, it'll fall to pieces. Broken...or like ice,

> melted. Victory over the enemy, a moral one.[3]

In the military, every individual is a reflection, a reprsentation of every other individual, with the result that they are all representations. If every man is a reflection, then there is no "original." Reflections of reflections. The soldiers actively seek to figuratively and literally create their own existences as representations, performative constitutions. This performative state is at all times contradicted by the actual physical presence of the actor's bodies which represent them.

The military's mimetic construction of soldiers is not restricted to the French side of the conflict. The Arab soldiers, through their search for a "flag," a symbol of hope, have by the end of the play become reflections of their enemies. In Scene thirteen an old woman named Ommu is willing to poison all the water supplies in order to stop the French, even if it means the death of the Arabs too. When the male characters try to promote the idea of combat instead because "putting arsenic in wells is a sin," Ommu replies: "Do sins scare you? We've nothing else to live but sins, we've got to live them. [...] Blessed be Saïd!"[4] For the Arabs, the only way to avoid turning into their enemy is to embrace "sin" and "evil." Ommu accuses an Arab soldier: "But maybe you've done it, you're joining them, and copying them excites you. To be their reflection is already to be one of them."[5] The military, and war in general, is troped as both a dramatic performance: "I'm obliged to tell you that even to knock off an Infidel one has to engage in such theatrical labour that one cannot be both actor and director,"[6] and a narcissistic copulation: "Get me! War's a rip-roaring orgy! [...] I want war and screwing in the sun!"[7] Life , for these characters, is a Theatre of Representation. The existence of the Arabs has become a construction controlled and mirrored by their oppressors, even through the act of war. When the Arabs rise to the occasion, they become just like those they oppose.

It is within these ontological representations of functional identity as a dramatic construction that *The Screens* makes the most telling comments about the functioning of intersubjective relations, and how they constitute identity in real life. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish,* observes the constitution of identity which the military performatively induces in soldiers:

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[3] Ibid., 119.

[4] Ibid., 133.

[5] Ibid., 135.

[6] Ibid., 127.

[7] Ibid., 150.

> By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it...[8]

Military ideology constructs the image of the "inapt body," as if the body is "formless clay," which is to be molded and shaped into an identity. The body, the physical, concrete, is incribed in this ideology as something "blank," an unwritten, nonsignifying slate. The representation of nonrepresentation. If the body always precedes and defeats "reading," to conceive of it as something which may be written upon is a reading of it which disguises itself as "reality." The identity of "soldier" which is written upon the body is a signifier occluding another, hidden signifier, the image of the body as inscribable. Foucault also explores the ramifications of these techniques in broader, social terms:

> The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power [...] These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines'. Many disciplinary methods had long been in existence - in monasteries, armies, workshops. But in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination.[9]

The military is simply one system among many which are social machines used for the regimented cultivation of identity in a performative manner. Within the context of the above illustrations, life remains portrayed as a Theatre of Representation. The military is a dramatic performance in the same sense that a play is: both construct the idea of a "blank body," and then "write" upon this representation, impose a figure that we call "character."

In Genet's play I read a thorough, dramatic critique of the idea that our identities, our egos, are essential facts of existence. To believe that your identity is something intrinsic to the fact of your body is to succumb to an illusion which Nietzsche aptly described and tried to lay to rest. Nietzsche points out that in life,

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[8] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 135.

[9] Ibid., 137.

> there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything. The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect.[10]

The ontological representations of "character" in *The Screens* undermine the illusion which Nietzsche's "popular mind" perpetuates: the idea that the "being" exists prior to the "doing," the "subject" exists prior to action, that the ego is an absolute presence, an essential fact of existence which precedes action, thought, interaction, communication. In this play, identity is portrayed as something which only comes about as a result of actions taken.

The dramatic ontological representation that general theatrical tradition calls "character" presents and reinforces the illusion of primacy of the subject over action, an illusion that is intertwined with concepts of essence, origin and logos. In my view, the theatre is the perfect trope for life. A criticism of theatre is also intrinsically entwined with a criticism of life. I watch a play happening on stage. A play is a series of physical actions, no more, no less. Movement, the creation of sound. The physical, actions, remain as real as they are to us every day. These actions create for the audience (and perhaps for the performer) the illusion called character. In a play, the audience knows that the subject is a fictive, illusory presence created by actions the actors perform. In life, the fictive "subject" is accepted as something precedent to action. On stage, the fiction we create in life is acknowledged for what it truly is: a fictive substantiation of action. The stage shows us the verity of the self: the subject follows the action, and not vice-versa. This is why the theatre is perhaps the most accurate trope for life: the theatre is the place where we show our selves to ourselves honestly, as the fictions that they are. Thus, when we engage in a critique of life, we must also engage in a critique of theatre, because the theatre is the place where we play out the structure of our existences, where the fictions we hide from every day are admitted to. The theatre boasts this distinction in the very structure of its art. Life is dramatic, and the drama is life.

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[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) 45.

There are no characters in *The Screens* who escape the necessity for a self-constituted identity, a unicity which reflects the transitive status of "self" within the realm of human discourse. Some Arabs in the play, forced into confrontation with their aggressors, constitute themselves like the Europeans. This may be read as an imposition of identity upon the Arabs by the Frenchmen, since the Europeans' intrusion results in an imposition of their ideological constructions upon the colonized. However, the play focuses closely on the actions of those whose identities are constructed, and implies that although in the social situations portrayed identity is destabilized, what that identity subsequently becomes is a matter always up to the "holder" of that identity. Ommu and the Arab men argue about what actions they should take, which implies to me that the identities they eventually take on are a result of their own decisions. I understand this optimistically. The destabilization of identity happens throughout this play. No one is free of it. But the writing of your identity under uncertain parameters is not necessarily controlled by another. The Europeans impose their own ideological constructions upon the Arabs: "If a Frenchman robs me, that Frenchman's a thief, but if an Arab robs me, he hasn't changed."[11] However the Arabs, through their overthrowing of the colonial tyranny, enact the will to control the incription of their own identities.

Identity in this play is in constant contrast with the concrete presence of the body. A colonizer and a Frenchman, Mr. Blankensee has, according to the stage directions "a big belly and a big behind,"[12] provided by padded attachments. Such exaggerated and unrealistic costuming is not unusual in this play. Genet includes explicit instructions concerning how the characters should appear:

> THE CHARACTERS:
>
> If possible, they will be masked. If not, highly made-up, painted (even the soldiers). Excessive make-up, contrasting with the realism of the costumes. It is best to provide a large variety of false noses - I shall indicate the form of some of these as the characters appear. At times, false chins as well. All this should be

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[11] Genet, *The Screens* 75.

[12] Ibid., 68.

> artfully harmonized with the colors of the costumes. No face should retain the conventional beauty of feature which is played up all too often on both stage and screen. In addition to the imagination of directors, there are thousands of new plastics that can be used in presenting plays nowadays.[13]

In Roger Blin's production[14], the first of *The Screens*, Blankensee has a grotesquely round stomach and ass, obvious for the padding that they are.[15] Genet establishes a convention at the opening of the play: these characters are represented by "unrealistic" costumes and embellishments, such as fake noses. As audience members we suspend our disbelief and accept unrealistic costuming as part of the character, just as the characters accept theatricalities as part of their representations. However, it seems there is a noticeable difference between Blankensee and other characters in the play:

> SIR HAROLD: (interested): Ah ha, you wear a pad. On your backside too, no doubt.
> MR. BLANKENSEE: To balance the other. A man of my age who doesn't have a belly and ass hasn't much prestige. So one has to fake a little.... (A slight silence.) In the old days, there were wigs.... It's well adjusted. (He shows it again.)
> SIR HAROLD: But the chambermaid...
> MR. BLANKENSEE: Oh, doesn't know about it. I'm discreet. It's as delicate a matter as dentures or a glass eye in a glass of water. Personal secrets. (A sigh.) Yes, it takes all that faking to impose ourselves... to be imposing! But I've come to see you to ask your help in working out a defense plan...[16]

What the audience took for a dramatic convention is disrupted at this point in the play. The physical presence of the actor's body, and of "Blankensee's" body, become contrasted to the padding which covers this body. Blankensee must create a representation of himself as the proper image of the coloniser before he will be taken as one. His costume seems to be somewhat more of a theatrical fakery than an ideological construction of self. However, the costume functions as an identity from the point of view of those who are not Blankensee. Blankensee himself is underneath that fakery, that construction. Such a dramatization of "self" seems problematic to me, since it implies that the man himself is unconstructed, real, true, essential. The man who speaks is not the construction of padding and costume. If his costume is the signifier of "Blankensee" for others, then the occluded signified is Blankensee himself. Those for whom Blankensee dons the costume, the Arabs, and even his companion Sir Harold, cannot tell the difference between the performative representation (the costume) and the original (Blankensee), until it is removed. This despite the ludicrous exaggeration the pads provide.

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[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] *The Screens*. By Jean Genet. Dir. Roger Blin. By the Jean-Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud Company. The Théâtre de France, Paris. April 21, 1966.

[15] Jean Genet, *Letters to Roger Blin: Reflections on Theatre*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1969) unnumbered photographic insert.

[16] Genet, *The Screens* 73.

Blankensee also implies that the Arabs will only be impressed by a constructed representation. However, until he is let in on the secret, Sir Harold too is accepting of Blankensee's costume. Genet's manipulation and subversion of the theatrical conventions he himself establishes serve to place us receivers in the same position as the characters in the play. Moments like these indicate to me that this play is not about Algerians, it is about the Eurocentric mentality that characterizes the play's initial audience. Within the realm of the drama he is deluding the other characters, but in reality his costume actually serves to delude the theatre audience. The audience has no reason to believe the pads are not a legitimate aspect of the theatrical representation known as "Blankensee" until Blankensee himself reveals the truth. The presence of a construction that is separable from Blankensee himself implies there is something real, natural, underneath. Blankensee describes his own perception of the "reality" of the colonisers' situation:

> People may laugh at us, at our love of this country, but you (He is moved.), you know that our love is real. It's we who made it, not they! Try to find a single one of them who can talk about it as we do! And about the thorns of my roses.[17]

The colonizers have a conscious awareness that they have "constructed" the country of Algeria, since they have planted rose bushes, oranges trees and cork trees everywhere. Such a statement from Blankensee implies that there was something which came before the Frenchmen's construction of the country. Yet the Europeans are ignorant of any "reality" which preceded their construction. Blankensee can no more see past his construction than can the other characters in the play. In physical terms, the Europeans have remade the country as they want it. They have thus appropriated it. The colonisers "construct." In dramatic terms, this "construction" is reflected on the screens which are the backdrop of the scene. In ideological terms, this construction may be read as a trope for the manner in which, in situations of colonialism, the colonizer's ideological forms are imposed upon the colonized, resulting in the effective rewriting of indigenous ideology and identity into a representation imposed on the native population.

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[17] Ibid., 74.

The message that emerges from moments like these in *The Screens* seems problematic, considering that the play is seemingly engaged in a critique of colonialism, centred on a specific war for self-determination. However, the play does not deal with the "facts" of the Franco-Algerian war. I propose that this supposed background for the play is a screen, a figurative image which may be "read." The play is not concerned with establishing a placement of actual events or "realistic" characters. It manipulates the idea of "colonialism," portraying Europeans who attempt to construct the existences of others, but who need to construct themselves in order to do so. I read *The Screens*' avoidance of a "realistic" examination of the Franco-Algerian war as a performative critique of the representation of representation. Ideological constructions, representations, are portrayed in the play as colonizing movements, a concept which immediately folds back upon the representation which is presenting it, in this case the play. As colonialism constructs the Other into a representation, so would a play that deals with an actual situation of colonialism. However, *The Screens* indicates a constant awareness of itself as a play, as a representation. It constantly indicates that it is a dramatic fiction, as do the characters in the play. In this manner the play becomes a representation which is constantly asserting itself as such, distancing itself from any concepts of authenticity or truth, rejecting these ideas as irrelevant within what is only a fiction. The play's consciousness of itself as a representation implies that it is a representation of representation, not a representation of the Franco-Algerian conflict, or a representation of practical ideology.

The Arabs in the play are not ignorant of the theatrical aspects of their existences. They do not blindly accept as valid that which is "fake." As aspects of the play they constantly assert the fictionality of this dramatic representation. When they revolt against their European oppressors (Scene twelve,) the act of revolt, what for the characters is an act of utmost passion and importance, is also metatheatrical "fakery," which they are conscious of as such. A long line of Arabs describe their acts of revolution, deeds they call "evil," deeds they have committed in order that evil might prevail. As each Arab explains what he has done for evil lately, he draws some image representing it on the screens on stage:

> KADDUR: (*In a hollow, but proud tone*): Their muzzles are still hot - put you hand on them - look: I picked up two revolvers.
> KADIDJA (*curtly*): Set them down there! ... Their muzzles are smoking ... the eyelets fierce and grinning ....
> *KADDUR very quickly draws the revolvers on the screen with a charcoal pencil. [...] The drawings should represent the objects monstrously enlarged.*[18]

Through the actions and the dialogue there seems to be some "rule" established that the drawings represent "real" objects to the characters on stage. The concept of "evil" is treated as a transitive property, and further is connected in this scene with theatricality. Representation seems to take on the connotation of "evil." The drawings that the Arabs commit to the screens have physical properties:

> LAHUSSEIN: Under the orange trees, raped one of their girls, I bring you the bloodstain.
> *He draws the bloodstain, in red, on the screen.*[19]

but at the same time the Arabs see these drawings as drawings:

> KUIDER: I was afraid. I ran away.
> KADIDJA: (*forcefully*): Thank you, my son. Draw your jitters! (*KUIDER draws two legs that seem to be running.*) And if any crap ran down you leg, don't forget it.[20]

These characters are conscious of the plurality of their existences. They draw images on the screens and are conscious that these images of things are just as relevant as what they represent. Further, they are drawn onto screens, which raises the issue of the title of the play. What is the importance of the screens? A screen can serve both to hide something and be a backdrop for something. It can both conceal an object, and "reveal" by backing an object. In this play it does not seem possible to narrow the function of the screens to one thing. Perhaps the screens themselves may be seen as the bar blocking signifier from signified. If the figures and images in this play are always already signifiers, their meanings lie elsewhere, possibly behind the screens, in anticipation of discovery. The screens are a bar both promising and denying "meaning." Even the title itself performs such a function. Any title seems to promise "meaning" behind its words, within the body of the text, but Genet's title remains to me bewilderingly unreadable. Obviously, "literally," it refers to the set of the play, yet to name a play after its backdrop appears somewhat taunting, demanding a figurative reading of the title. But a figurative reading is also frustrated. The screens remain the screens. They are a physical presence onstage. It is the equivalent of calling a play *The Actors*. No matter how I may figuratively interpret such a title, it would also always end up literally referring to the actual actors on the stage. The title of *The Screens*, promising yet at the same time denying "meaning," is another indication to me that this play is about representation, and that the "literal" subject of "colonialism" may be troped back and forth with what the screens "represent."

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[18] Ibid., 97.

[19] Ibid., 98.

[20] Ibid., 100.

These "drawings of evil" seem to embody many qualities of linguistic signifiers. They are performances of the idea that a figure does not need the "presence" of its signified in order for it to be readable. Further, the drawings on the screens represent concepts and ideas, such as emotions or feelings. The Arabs are even aware of the physical properties of their metatheatrical surroundings:

> NASSER: I yelled "down with the bastards" and my scream fluttered the backdrop stretched across the horizon. And here's my scream!
> *He draws a screaming mouth, from which a streak emerges, and goes to the left.*[21]

This fakery, rather than being a "part" of the characters, is an aspect of the experience that surrounds them, and is restricted to the fields of representation that surround the characters. Lacan has demonstrated in his writings that there is a quality of the metonymic axis of the signifying chain which can be described as anticipation of *the something else*. Within language there is an integral function of anticipation, the desire to understand, the waiting for the something else, the truth, which the process so far promises - the desire for the always anticipated, never arrived Other that is a motivating factor in human discourse. Lacan:

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[21] Ibid., 99.

> [...] the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term; 'I shall never...', 'All the same it is...', 'And yet there may be...', Such sentences are not without meaning, a meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it.[22]

The signifying chain, Lacan claims, follows the same structure as the unconscious, and thus anticipation is a crucial part of the underlying structure of the psyche. It is a primary factor in the fueling of human desire. The fakery found in *The Screens* surrounds characters who are aware of their desire for absence as a thing unto itself. As in Lacan's work, *The Screens* shows us that we seek out Absence, deluding ourselves by imposing imaginary objects over the image of our true desire.

There are a number of ontological representations in the play which are characterized by various attributes and parameters which indicate a lack of some kind, some sort of absence which implies a dissociation from an essence. Yet they seem to be just as real as the walking, talking, signifying characters. Scene three of *The Screens* opens with a strange and impossible image: Saïd's pants. The hooded Leila is introduced for the first time, engaging in a bizarre worship of Saïd's pants, pants which somehow stand themselves upright. Leila engages in a monologue with Saïd's pants that illustrates how the characters in this play interact with their environment. To Leila, Saïd's pants are potentially just as useful as the man himself:

> Well, won't you move? You go strolling about at night in my dreams, you let the wind blow up your legs, but in my presence you play dead. And yet you're alive, warm, ready for anything, for walking, pissing, spitting, coughing, smoking, farting like a man, and mounting a horse, and being mounted by me...[23]

Indeed the pants do appear to have some life to them, as they stand up free of outside support. In this play, these pants somehow manifest an ontological representation of "self." It is an enactment, both figurative and literal, of how clothing and other such shells have the equal potential of that which they mask. Leila seeks to escape her existence, in this situation through dreams in which she is not "ugly" and not married to Saïd. The pants provide an imaginary escape into a better situation. The pants are a representation of the man, a kind of performance of Saïd, but do not have any intrinsic truth associable with them, despite their validity for Leila. Saïd's pants, perhaps because they are a kind of fiction which Leila can romanticize, have more shapely thighs and a rounder behind, she claims. Lacking authenticity, the pants seem to be an improvement over the real thing.

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[22] Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* 153.

[23] Genet, *The Screens* 24-5.

This lack of authenticity in the representation is reflected in two ways. First: the sheer unbelievability of this image. Pants with a life of their own? One is inclined to say "utter fantasy." This much is obvious. The second factor concerning the pants' lack of truth is what they are: pants. They are the shell that houses the "Real:" the human being. Further, there is a factor of gender to take into account, as the pants are an image of masculinity, and constitute a male ontology. The pants are signifiers of "Saïd." He is their "Meaning." Yet the pants are concrete, present, and Saïd is absent. The pants are the covering, the construction, which surrounds and serves to illustrate the "Real." Yet here the clothes, the shell, the constructed performance, have a life of their own which is firmly divorced and contrasted from their signified. Here is, impossibly, paradoxically, representation that, since it is purposefully without truth, is by inference also divorced from its signified. The representation for its own sake, in a sense. The signifier independent of its signified. Lacan describes the privilege of the signifier over the signified in the signifying chain. He points out that it is only an

> illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever.[24]

As I read Lacan, signifiers form a complex interconnecting web which is a closed system, operating in loose connexion with their signifieds. There is something confusing and treacherous about this. Perhaps the key to understanding these figures in *The Screens* is that the representation, rather than the original, is preferred. The fiction is preferred because it is fiction, and has no reality. Absence, always present as an unattainable absolute, exerts power over these characters. As in the metonymic relation, one signifier occults and takes primacy over another, turning the occulted signifier, Saïd, into a signified, which is no longer primary in importance. His absence, contained in the signifier, takes precedence.

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[24] Lacan, 150.

The absence of Saïd, in my reading of *The Screens*, becomes a presence unto itself as the play unravels. Early scenes involve a gradual undermining of his physical presence. Several scenes take place where he is either addressed offstage,[25] becoming for the audience a presence that is not "present," lacking the form of a solid actor's body; or he is the absent subject of discussion for an entire scene,[26] and his appearance at the end of the scene seems secondary in comparison to his absence. Gradually, he is absent more and more often, and when he is present he expresses his desire to leave the country and work in a coal mine in France.[27] By the midpoint of the play he leaves, on his way to "the land of the monster."[28] Saïd's departure from Algeria is dramatically portrayed by his physical disappearance from the play for most of the second half of the drama. This, I feel, may be read as a rejection on his part not just of his social environment, but also of his environment as a realm of dramatic representation, a theatrical existence which all of these characters are conscious of as such. Saïd leaves this Theatre of Representation. He has no interest in representing anything.

Despite Saïd's absence through key sections of the play, he is constantly the focus of action and attention of the characters who are present. Saïd, through both his actions and inactions, is constantly asserted as the central focus of the play, especially when he is absent. He is in my reading the fullest manifestation of the power that absence has over the other figures in this play. It is the idea of "Saïd" which has influence and holds sway over characters and events:

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[25] In Scene Two, p. 23, Warda addresses Saïd, but we never see or hear him.

[26] In Scene three, the Pants, for some time, take the place of Saïd. His arrival is anticipated by the arrival of his shadow (p. 26.) In Scene Five Saïd is again the subject of the scene, in that he is what the characters discuss, but his presence is absent until the ending of the scene. In Scene six he is the subject of an extended argument between the women. He himself remains absent.

[27] Genet, *The Screens* 31.

[28] Ibid., 108.

> *The light returns, but it is very weak. KADIDJA is alone. She is holding a lighted candle and standing against the screen, right.*
> KADIDJA: (*in a very serene tone*): I'm dead? So I am. Well, not yet! I haven't finished my job. So, Death, I'll fight it out with you! Saïd, Leila, my loved ones! You, too, in the evening related the day's evil to each other. You realized that in evil lay the only hope. Evil, wonderful evil, you who remain when all goes to pot, miraculous evil, you're going to help us. I beg of you, evil, and I beg you standing upright, impregnate my people. And let them not be idle![29]

Even a figure as dynamic and powerful (in both the form and content of the drama) as Saïd's Mother is subject to the power of Saïd's overwhelming apathy and anarchistic detachment, his resistance to "meaning," a resistance which the Arabs come to define as "evil." Through his desire for detachment from any of the forces operating upon each other throughout *The Screens* (which is most effectively visualized by his actual, physical absence through a large section of the play), Saïd becomes even more central in focus, as he becomes, through his isolation and absence, a focus of strength and a symbol for the characters in the play. As the play progresses Saïd is embraced by those he rejected and who rejected him.

The structure of the play itself serves the power of anticipation, the desire for absolute absence, as the audience begins to wonder where Saïd is, just as do the characters who are waiting for him. Like any good narrative, the play makes us wait for the end, for closure and meaning, for understanding. Ironically, that very subject is what is debated over in the final scene. The play's conclusion supports my reading of Saïd's absence. At the end of the play a conflict arises over possession of Saïd, but what the combatants actually argue over is the "meaning" of Saïd. Each group wishes to make a flag out of him - a symbol of a cause. Saïd himself is of little importance in this argument, as they only want the signifier "Saïd" for their own uses, effectively abandoning the physical body on stage as immaterial.

As *The Screens* proceeds, more and more characters die, moving to a different level of the stage backed with white screens. Saïd, apparently, has been killed by the Arab troops in punishment for his betrayal, says Si Slimane,[30] and the Mother, dead, begins to anticipate his arrival on the dead level. Scene Seventeen becomes focused around the imminent arrival of the long absent Saïd. All the areas and levels of the playing space are engaged in this scene, and when Saïd enters, it is not on the "dead level", but the playing area at the centre of the stage (centre, second floor).[31] Saïd does not appear to be "dead," but then again, neither is he spatially grouped with the still living characters. He is isolated. Ommu reveals what fate is intended for Saïd: "we've got to embalm your shittiness, so that none of it's lost."[32] She elaborates further:

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[29] Ibid., 97.

[30] Ibid., 161.

> it's dead that we want you, dead, but it's alive not dead...
> SAÏD (*furiously*): That's leaving me dead alive!
> OMMU (*threateningly*): It's neither dead nor alive! ... All honor to sordidness! Storm the living! ... Legion of Honor, a comma on the whitewash of latrines!
> SAÏD (*still furious*): That's leaving me dead alive!
> OMMU (*almost in a trance*): And if it were necessary to sing, to sing ... If it were necessary to invent Said... If it were necessary word by word, here and there, to spit, to slobber a whole story ... written or recited ... to slobber the Saïd story...[33]

The desire of the Arabs is to turn "Saïd" into a story, a song, a representation, so that "Saïd" might be preserved. This desire, I feel, should be read as both figurative and literal from the point of view of these characters. What they seek to do figuratively will have a "literal," "real" effect on Saïd. The "meaning" they wish to assign to him will constitute his effective identity.

Genet's manipulation of theatrical conventions creates a dramatic universe where the figurative and the literal simultaneously have power over these characters. This is reflective, in my opinion, of the structure of language in general, as I examined it in the last chapter. The figurative and the literal are always already complicit. All words are figures, and at the same time there would be no metaphor if metonymy did not come first. These characters, conscious that their effective lives are representative constructions, further reflect, in their behaviour, an awareness of the intersubjective relationship between thought and language. This demonstrates, for me, a performative enactment of the ways in which our thoughts and perceptions of life serve to constitute that life. Colonialism here becomes a trope for life in general, wherein everyday relationships involve the construction of others, the construction of our selves as an other, the process of colonization on an individual scale.

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[31] Ibid., 186.

[32] Ibid., 192.

[33] Ibid., 193.

Into the conflict over Saïd come Arab combatants, who stake their own claim to him, telling him to join the side of logic and reason, and they will forgive him.[34] The two sides, reason (the living soldiers) and chaos (the dead sin-mongers), start to argue over possession of Saïd. The contest between these two sides is a competition over who will give meaning to the Arab victory:

> THE COMBATANT (*to the dead*): That'll do. You're not going to appropriate the victory or determine the meaning it's to be given. That's for us the living to decide.[35]

Saïd himself is wanted by neither side, but both sides want what he represents. Ommu wants him as a "flag,"[36] an image of "Saïd" which can be constructed within a song. Even though Ommu *et al* are at odds with the Arab soldiers, both sides of the conflict are portrayed as reflections of the colonials, because they are "organizing" and seeking to find "meaning" in the figure of Saïd. Even death is not free of "meaning." The message I read in this final scene is not a hopeful one. Even victorious in overthrowing their oppressors, the characters, influenced as they are by the colonizers, even in the act of resistance are forced to be like those they resist.

Saïd becomes colonized. Ommu doesn't want the man Saïd, she just seems to want the construction or shape of "Saïd," as long as it doesn't get shot by the soldiers:

> OMMU: (*with a cry*): Escape! Clear out of yourself! Through your mouth or asshole, but clear out, don't stay here![37]

Alone amongst all these figures, the Mother encourages Saïd to be true to his nomadic, nonsignifying desires:

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[34] Ibid., 196.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 190.

[37] Ibid., 198.

> Make a getaway. Don't let yourself be conned by either the old girl or the soldiers. Don't serve either of them, don't serve any purpose whatever. I think they're going to make up a song about you. The words have been written. People are humming it. It's in the air. (*She screams.*) Saïd, squelch the inspiration, shit on them!...[38]

Saïd indeed does try to leave, and just as he gets out of sight the combatants shoot him. "A body is heard collapsing" read the stage directions. Ommu says that he will be tossed in the dump. Logically, Saïd should appear on the dead level:

> THE MOTHER: Saïd! ... I'll simply have to wait for him....
> KADIDJA (*laughing*): Don't bother. He'll no more be back than will Leila.
> THE MOTHER: Then where is he? In a song?
> *KADIDJA extends her palms with a gesture expressive of doubt.*[39]

Saïd's final entrance signifies the entrance of "meaning" and understanding which is supposed to come at the end of a narrative, in a sense satisfying the structure of the signifying chain which underlies all discourse, as well as the unconscious. The debate over Saïd's meaning tropes as a debate over the narrative's meaning. However, Saïd just disappears, performatively denying meaning to the end of the play, enacting the frustration of understanding, and obeying closely the structure of the chain of signification, which promises closure without ever actually delivering it. Saïd's disappearance reifies the presence of Absence.

Saïd's disappearance is the performance of nonsignification, rather than nonsignification itself. I read it as a performance of the idea of the Theatre of Cruelty. The play pretends to ask: Has Saïd escaped serving any purpose whatsoever? The play performs the question: Has Saïd avoided "meaning" something, has he avoided becoming a "flag," and as a result, has he escaped existence, where everything has "meaning," and thus is fictional, constructed, representative? Or has Saïd been turned into a representation, a "song", the story of Saïd? My response to this question is that the play itself is a representation, one part of which is Saïd. The "song of Saïd" is this play, *The Screens*. Genet's play, the fiction, the story of Saïd, causes the concrete, physical body of the actor, to vanish. The play, despite its ending, does not avoid meaning, and this I read as a purposeful irony. This play, this fiction, seems to negate Saïd, the individual, while actually preserving him as an idea. Saïd's own people want to turn him into a myth, a flag, a song, and assign him some sort of purpose. They want to write their own Saïd who is neither dead nor alive but somewhere in between. *The Screens* itself does write this figure of "Saïd."

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[38] Ibid., 199.

[39] Ibid., 201.

Like Artaud's writings, Genet's play may be understood as a performance of the desire to escape meaning, even though it is impossible to do so. The irony of Artaud's endeavour is his use of words to deny the control of words. In *The Screens*, life is a Theatre of Representation, and representations and images are just as restrictive, just as enslaved to meaning along the signifying chain as are words. The result of this parallel is that the difference between words and images collapses. Within discourse they are as one.

Rather than concluding my examination of *The Screens* with the story of Saïd, as the play does, I would rather examine the play's treatment of Leila. Saïd's disappearance is the central focus of the play's climax, but Leila's disappearance is practically ignored, without any "explanation" even pondered. The play, in my reading, actually forgets about her. In a play where I read a central focus on absence, Leila's absence demands attention. Leila, allegedly the ugliest woman in the village, is rejected even by her own husband, Saïd, who forces her to wear a hood all the time, and rather than sleeping with her visits Warda. The audience will never see Leila's face, and thus must take as a given Leila's "ugliness," without ever having the face of the actor to use as a reference point to ground this concept of "ugly" in some solid appearance. Leila's ugliness appears to be transitive, a quality which is affected by her actions, her behaviour and her attitude, specifically the fact that she always wears a hood. She explains to Saïd:

> - It's my ugliness, earned hour by hour, that speaks, or what speaks? [...] I want you to - it's my ugliness, earned minute by minute, that speaks - to be without hope. I want you to choose evil and always evil. I want you to know only hatred and never love. I want you - it's my ugliness, earned second by second, that speaks - to refuse the brilliance of darkness...[40]

Her "ugliness," I feel, has nothing to do with the appearance of her face. Her ugliness is "earned," it

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[40] Ibid., 108-9.

"speaks" for her. The very concept of "ugliness" is debunked and exposed as a set of values cultivated solely by arbitrary opinion, without basis in actual appearance. Within the context of "Leila," "ugly" is a valueless value judgment. Her ugliness, that which defines her in the eyes of the other characters, can only ever be an absence in this play. Her ugliness appears to be something that is imposed on her by the other characters' condemnations of her as ugly, which she constitutes by the wearing of her hood. Leila more than performs through her hood the idea of "ugly" which the other characters impose on her. "Leila" is the hood. The mask is a signifier of "Leila." The hood eventually comes to represent an unknown, the presence of an absence, as Leila's actual "ugliness" becomes immaterial. The hood signifies Leila's ugliness. The "true," the "authentic," the "essential," are assumed yet never provided or accounted for. The physical body of the actor, the presence of the concrete fact which precedes signification, is blocked by a hood which the actor wears.

The absence of essence in Leila's identity is most reinforced by her eventual disappearance. As evidence of her existence all that is left of her is the hood, which I read as the actual definition of "Leila." There is a clue in Scene Nine concerning the reason for Leila's seeming evaporation late in the play:

> THE MOTHER: What interests her is the holes. The more there are, the better she likes it. In fact, what she likes best is to wrap herself for the night in a big hole. The ideal thing would be for her to find one that only a north wind and the smell of manure pass through.[41]

The desire to negate oneself by wrapping oneself in a void illustrates the desire for absence which motivates the characters in this play, and may be read as an explanation for what eventually happens to Leila. Leila's final appearance occurs at the end of scene fifteen. She appears alone on stage, isolated, with the rest of the stage dark. From her monologue it becomes evident that she is in the process of dying, one eye lost, and abandoned by Saïd. She hears him searching for her, and yelling her name. Leila realizes that she is "going to have to descend to death." She asks herself

> I wonder how to go about it. Because the question is: is death a lady, like the smell I told to sit down beside me on the manure pile - are you there? - a lady who'll come and get me, or is it a place

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[41] Ibid., 67.

> you have to go to? Hard to tell...[42]

Death, then, is a transitive, inconstant process in this play, at least for Leila. Following the logic of the rest of the play so far, she should be on her way to the dead level, where all the other characters who "die" go, but Leila never arrives there. The dead characters are expecting her, and Si Slimane goes so far as to say "She's sinking real slow. She's dying the way she lived: like a lazybones."[43] But instead Leila disappears, and the only trace of her that remains is her hood, found by the Warda on her way to the dead level. All that is left is the representation. Was there something real, true, original, underneath? She is just gone. The hood, the signifier of "Leila" remains, but the signified Leila is divorced from the hood and vanishes without a trace. The irony of this ontological representation is that it is the signifier, the hood, which is physical and tangible in the world of *The Screens*, and the signified is performed as transitive, possibly an illusion, and at the very least ephemeral enough to simply drift away like smoke. Does Leila achieve what Saïd seeks to do? Should we be happy for her? The play provides no answers to such questions.

Whereas both Saïd and Leila physically disappear from the play, Saïd's desire for nonrepresentation seems to be frustrated by the writing of songs, the construction of him by others into their image of "Saïd." On the other hand, Leila really seems to vanish, so much so that the narrative becomes relatively unconcerned with her after her disappearance. No one seems terribly concerned about Leila. "Reading" meaning into this play continues to challenge me, asking that I "read" that which is not present, that I attempt to read "Absence." I am confronted by the subjectivity of my own response. To wrap yourself in a Void, which Leila seems to do, means to become functionally immaterial. I return once more to the trope of the Body Without Organs. If it is a figuration of the idea of an unrepresentative existence, a limit which is yearned for but never achieved, then Leila's diappearance may be seen as a critical enactment of the theoretical move towards that limit. The loss of her hood, that which carries her signification, frees her of its stigma, but it is the stigma which all signification carries. For Leila, escaping her own signification means ontological evaporation; non-existence. This message seems pessimistic. The value of escaping your "meaning" is apparent in the case of Leila, who carries a stigma of "ugliness" which is assigned to her by those who observe her, but her attempt to escape what she "means" results in her not existing any more, not "meaning" anything at all. Ironically, the signifier, her hood, remains, but she disappears. The signifier remains indissoluable.

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[42] Ibid., 157.

[43] Ibid., 159.

CHAPTER FOUR: READING *SPELL #7* BY NTOZAKE SHANGE

Cruel theatre, cruel life. Genet's play remains at all times aloof, concealed behind a sardonic veil of "fantasy" and imagination, full of distant humour and cleverness. From the start, ntozake shange's[1] *spell #7* contains tones of anger, earnestness, determination, desperation. Lacan calls resistance to the power of the chain of signification a "game" without match-point,[2] and from his point of view, one which I read as decidedly aloof and detached, the desire to resist signification does remain an academic exercise. I must self-critically admit that I see in my own work an association with Lacan's stance. In contrast, unrepresentation was never a game for Artaud. My reading of *spell #7* perceives in the theatre piece a desire to resist signification that challenges, and, I feel, rewrites, the portrayal of the yearning for nonsignification as a "game" which is unwinnable. In this theatre piece, resistance to signification is not a performative game, it is a practical necessity. Further, the desire to escape signification is circumvented and itself rewritten as the desire to rewrite signification. "Meaning" is not something to be escaped, but rather, in more practical, socially feasible terms, something to be appropriated and rewritten. The title of *spell #7* refers not so much to a narrative or an event, as to the theatre piece itself. Within shange's work, performance is portrayed as having a "magical" effect on the audience and performer alike, and thus the title, *spell #7: geechee jibara quik magic trance manual for technologically stressed third world people*, describes the play itself, the event that this theatre piece creates on stage - a performance which has a "magical" effect on both audience and performers. shange's work challenges the Eurocentric standards associated with "theatre," specifically the representation of character. Her techniques destabilize traditional theatrical notions of ontological representation. shange also rejects the idea of "plot" or "narrative" in *spell #7*, inducing the critical writer (myself) to find a new way of summarizing her work.

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[1] I do not capitalize shange's name or the name of her theatre piece since she does not do so herself. I read her lack of capitalization as a performative critique of the strictures of standard American english.

[2] Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* 166.

Generally, *spell #7* has two environments where action is situated: Onstage, where the African-American performers wear grotesque blackface masks and play primarily to the audience, and Offstage, an environment known as the Bar, where these same performers no longer wear the blackface masks, are "themselves," and "perform" for each other. *spell #7* is a series of performances, in which the performers slide in and out of "characters," sometimes playing more than one character at the same time, always challenging the strictures of the traditional representation of character onstage. These characters take turns describing various situations and states that African-Americans suffer as a legacy of slavery and colonial oppression, states in which identity is disrupted. As there is no real story or plot to be followed, the play is instead a series of dramatic problematizations of the cultivation of the self. Within shange's work, identity is subjected to a critical study, and numerous different modes of ontological representation emerge as a result of shange's technique, making singular and significant statements about African-American existence. In my analysis of the theatre piece, my attention is focused for the most part on understanding how shange's work critiques the idea of "character."

The theatre piece confronts the legacy of colonialism and slavery within, specifically, the lives of African-Americans. The history of slavery in America is a history of representation, a history of writing upon the body of the other, the body whose skin is a different colour than yours, and assigning "meaning" to the body of the other. In *Thinking Through the Body*, Jane Gallop describes the desire to "read" the body, which the body always already defeats by simply being "the body."[3] Shange's describes the inscription of representation upon the body which blks[4] suffer under the thrall of colonialism. From the point of view of the group who have one skin color, the skin of the other always carries "meaning." Words like "nigger" and "honkey" are assigned to the signifier of skin color. The performers in *spell #7* indicate an awareness that from the moment of the very first scene of colonial oppression imposed on blks, the lives of blks became constructed, a performance, a Theatre of Representation:

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[3] I make reference to this on pages 9-10 of this thesis.

[4] My use of the spelling "blk" is respective of shange's own use of it in the theatre piece. I read it as a trope for African-American existence, a rewriting of the word "black," and a spelling which performatively implies the appropriation of the signification which African-American existence carries.

> LILY
> no/ we're not outta our minds/ we've been doing this shit a long time... ross/ captain theophilis conneau/ in a slaver's logbook/ says that "youths of both sexes wear rings in the nose and lower lip and stick porcupine quills thru the cartilage of the ear."[5]

This is one of few moments in this theatre piece when colonialism is explicitly described, although it is implicit throughout. Lily's words imply that the blks are in fact living a tradition of "life as a performance for the colonisers" that has plagued blks from the moment the colonialists enslaved them. Further, the above quote implies that the moment the colonialist slaver looked at blks, the lives of blks became performance. The implication follows that pre-colonial existence was/is a time prior to performance, having some "essence" or "truth." Further, Lily's reference to the logbook foregrounds the issue of words. According to Lily, the lives of blks became performance when the colonialist slaver recorded a representation of them in words. Thus, in this passage, the colonialist creates representation, creates difference, through the recording of the word, the logos, that describes the differentiated subject.

In *spell #7*, shange thematizes a paradox of blk existence. The figures in *spell #7* are blk, and to be blk means to have your identity constructed and defined within white hegemony and control. This constructed identity is symbolized by the ominous blackface mask which hangs over the stage during sections of the performance. Within the environment of the bar that mask is absent. It is in this bar setting that these blk performers and artists seem to be free from white colonial oppression. Yet it is also in the bar that a paradox begins to emerge. These characters, once free of the mask of white hegemony, experience a sense of incompleteness, which prompts the desire to construct their own "selves." As this theatre piece "reads" the skin of African-Americans, to be blk "means" to desire to construct anew your own nature. The essential encompasses the desire to construct.

There are moments in *spell #7* where the performers describe their sense of "self" as something transferable, as if their selves, their identities, are somehow attached to them and not intrinsic to their natures. This detachable nature of their selves is linked to the colour of their skins. Figuratively, skin becomes detachable: "in this place where magic stays you can let yrself in or out/ but when you leave yrself at home/ burglars and daylight thieves pounce on you & sell yr skin/ at cut-rates on tenth avenue,"[6] Lou explains. The "self" and "skin" are connected, yet detachable, but Lou's warning implies that for these characters the two must be kept together out of necessity. The figure of the self/skin is described as property, not an extrinsic aspect of one's constitution - the painful legacy of the history of colonialism and slavery. The figurative imagery which *spell #7*'s poetry is filled with is, as is evident in the above example, "self" referential, troping the physical "fact" of the body, in this case "skin," with the concept of identity, the "figure" of the ego. This poetry, these figurative manipulations of images and ideas using the trope of the body, are in the performative situation tripped up and nailed down by the fact of the actor's body, present on stage, speaking these words to the audience. The theatre piece's manipulation of figurative and literal imagery results in a subtle erasure of the seeming distinction between the literal and the figurative within the realm of performance. This erasure illustrates, for me, that within the realm of practical experience, figures, representations, when imposed upon the site of the body, are capable of historically constructing social identities.

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[5] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7*, in *9 Plays By Black Women*, ed. Margaret B. Wilkerson (New York: Mentor, 1986) 255.

The erasure of the distinction between the figurative and the literal operating effectively upon the lives of these blks is dramatized in different ways throughout the theatre piece. "Natalie" and "Alec" tell the story of a woman named sue-jean, "a ordinary colored girl with no claims to any thing,"[7] as Natalie describes her. Sue-jean wants to have a baby boy called "myself." The pregnancy, the creation by sue-jean of "myself" (herself) brings happiness, motivation and purpose to sue-jean's life. However, once the child is born and begins to crawl (away) sue-jean becomes despondent and withered. She kills her child and sucks his blood back into her, expecting a further pregnancy, which does not happen, but she remains "heavy & full all her life/ with 'myself.'"[8] The poem, which is in form an enactment of creation, an embodiment of the creative process, in theme describes the desire to create one's self out of one's self. This desire is portrayed as painful and isolating, and ultimately causes sue-jean to kill her own child. This story is told as a story, a representation in which Natalie plays "sue-jean," taking on this character and telling "her" story. "Natalie" is thus a dramatic representation of a representation, a figure of a figure. Within the dramatic representation which is the "story" of sue-jean, the naming of the child "myself" immediately erases the distinction between a "literal" and a "figurative" reading. "Myself" is a representation, the name of her child, but, told as it is within a story, it is always already a representation of herself, to be understood "literally." This complicated disruption of traditional signification makes it impossible for me to determine which reading of "myself" is the figurative one. Both are, yet at the same time neither is. Sue-jean's "self" is thus portrayed as a performative figure, in practical terms literal and figurative at the same time. I read her desire for the creation of her "self" as a desire to rewrite her identity, a desire which she does not appear to be able to control.

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[6] Ibid., 267.

[7] Ibid., 268.

[8] Ibid., 271.

Rather than rejecting the performative aspect of their existences, the performers embrace it, banishing the mask of minstrelsy and reconstructing the performance space into a bar. The huge overhanging blackface mask disappears and the bar is introduced by Eli's poem, which begins "MY kingdom."[9] This poem describes simultaneously "the construction of myself/ my city my theater/ my bar."[10] "MY kingdom" indicates to the audience that while watching this theatre piece the viewer is entering a privileged and highly personal space. The audience enters shange's poems by experiencing them, and also enters, as Eli says, "my kingdom my city my self." His poem defines the experience available to the performers in the bar: "the construction of myself." Identity becomes fluid and negotiable within this segregated, magical environment. One manner in which this fluid identity is manifested is through the voice of the poet, which is apparent and unhidden in all of the poems in the performance. Eli says he is a poet, creating a parallel between his "character" and shange herself. The poem "MY kingdom" carries weight as a trope for the whole theatre piece. Just as the bar is a magical segregated environment where performance is self-motivated and self is self-constructed, so is the theatre piece *spell #7*.

In Eli's poem, self is constructed, and self is influenced by environment. Further, self is a manifestation of action. His poetry is a figure of his self, as his self is "poet." Eli explains the definition of his self as a poet:

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[9] Ibid., 252.

[10] Ibid., 253.

> ...i am a poet/ i write poems
> I make words cartwheel & somersault down pages
> outta my mouth come visions distilled like bootleg
> whiskey/ i am like a radio but i am a channel of
> my own
> i keep saying i write poems/ & people keep askin
> me
> what i do/ what in the hell is going on?
> [...]   i am a poet/
> i am not a part-time poet/ i am not an amateur
> poet/
> i dont even know what that person cd be/ whoever
> that is
> authorizing poetry as an avocation/ is a fraud/
> put yr own feet on the ground.[11]

For Eli, there is no distinction between his identity and his actions. His self is poet, and being poet defines his actions. Eli describes a process whereby through the writing of poetry, the assembling and creation of words, he constructs his self, which is a poet. Further, for Eli being a poet is not a question of a job, or a possibility. It is not a choice he has made. It is who he is. He is not engaged in an avocation. He is in the process of constantly reconstituting his self. His every action is participating in the assertion of his existence, his identity, which is defined by the word poet. Eli's poem can be seen as a mirror of *spell #7*, and implies that the theatre piece serves the poet as a means whereby through the creation of her poetry, she creates her self. Further, the poems spoken by Eli enact a close correlation between self and action in *spell #7*, as if the two were interchangeable.

Eli's poetry foregrounds the constitution of self through actions. The manner in which self is defined by action is an operating factor in any theatre piece, a performative environment where "character" is constantly constituted by the actions of the actors. Shange implies that the same rules of the stage apply to the lives of these blks within the magical, segregated environment of the bar. Concepts of performance manipulate the conventions of the stage, and hint that within the (de-) constructed and fragmented lives of blks an element of performance is always present, and this element defines identity. The element of performance is portrayed as fluid and transitive, but the performers in this play are not able to escape the performative element of their existences. Their nature encompasses the desire for self-construction. Rather than desiring to escape into a nonsignifying existence, these characters seek to rewrite their own significations. This somewhat paradoxical state of existence carries connotations which may be construed in alternately positive and negative manners.

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[11] Ibid., 264.

The ambiguous connotations which a self-created nature implies may be read in Lily's performance of the constitution of identity through repetitive action. This dramatization focuses upon the visual locus of hair, and the performative, social significations hair carries:

> i'm gonna simply brush my hair. rapunzel pull yr tresses back into the tower. & lady godiva give up horseback riding. i'm gonna alter my social and professional life dramatically. i will brush 100 strokes in the morning/ 100 strokes midday & 100 strokes before retiring. i will have a very busy schedule. between the local trains and the express/ i'm gonna brush. i brush between telephone calls. at the disco i'm gonna brush on the slow songs/ i don't slow dance with strangers.[12]

In her own words, the brushing of her hair is "dramatic," performative. This poem describes an obsessive repetitive fixation on brushing one's hair, an act which is both introverted and extroverted, because it is concerned with the constitution of your "self" for others to see (even if it is the you that looks at your self). In this sense the brushing of the hair becomes a repeated act which constructs the self.[13] The poem, through its repetitive language, advances the idea that the brushing of her hair comes to encompass all of Lily's time. Eventually, says Lily, her hair grows to the point where she cannot raise her head from the pillow. Lily enacts this by physically falling to the floor, then explains how the repetitive act takes over her life: "i brush & brush. i may lose contact with most of my friends. i cd lose my job/ but i'm on unemployment & brush while waiting on line for my check."[14] The poem describes the growth of Lily's hair, and the eventual movement of it into the centre of Lily's life:

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[12] Ibid., 265.

[13] My reading of this poem is inspired by Judith Butler's article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-ellen Case (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), in which she explores the idea that identity is constituted through a "stylized repetition of acts," 270.

[14] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7*, 265.

> i'll find ambrosia. my hair'll grow pomegranates & soil/ rich as round the aswan/ i wake in my bed to bananas/ avocados/ collard greens/ the tramps' latest disco hit/ fresh croissant/ pouilly fuisse/ ishmael reed's essays/ charlotte carter's stories/ all stream from my hair.[15]

Even as her hair constrains and holds her down, it also provides all that she needs to subsist. Her self constructed image seems both restrictive and providential.

Lily's obsession with the appearance of her hair may be read as a response to the stereotypical idea that women are supposed to have long, well-groomed hair. Lily will outdo the mythologized figures of "rapunzel" and "lady godiva," white women known for their plentiful tresses. There is a great deal of irony inherent to the conjuring up of these two images. Rapunzel was emprisoned in a tower (physically and figuratively, if the tower is read as an image of phallic emprisonment), and emprisoned by her hair (both physically and figuratively, if the hair is read as a figure of her enslavement to the strictures of the gender-image imposed on her, specifically that of women having long hair). Rapunzel's hair is the means by which her male suitor can visit her at his leisure. However, Rapunzel's access to her suitor may be read as liberating, an assertion of freedom from the imprisonment to which she is subjected. The hair is both constrictive and liberating, depending on how it is "read." Lady Godiva enacts the image of Botticelli's Venus, the nude blonde whose modesty is barely maintained by her long locks, in effect sexualizing her hair, which serves to "hide," and thus represent, her sexualized parts. However, Godiva also represents an image of female liberation, of social transgression, as a woman who presented herself free of the constraining strictures of her society. The images are problematic, and do not yield easy "meanings." The further irony of mentioning Rapunzel and Lady Godiva is that Lily's hair, as she dreams of it, is "lavender & nappy as a 3-yr-old's in a apple tree."[16] Lily's afro-natural hair will "go on & on forever/ irregular like a rasta-man's hair." Lily's hair grows out of control, enslaving her by stealing her mobility and requiring her constant attention, in effect demanding her actions to be subservient to this definition of her self. Yet at the same time this out of control nature of her hair implies freedom and liberation. Lily's situation makes explicit what is implied in the stories of Rapunzel and Lady Godiva. The trope of hair as enslaving definition of woman's self is problematized by the promise of freedom which it also offers. The comparison with the white women is contrasted and ironized by the fact that Lily's hair is afro-natural, a visual element which defines her apart from those stereotyped images of European femininity, the long-haired white woman. Lily's performance encompasses the construction of both feminity and race that occurs within her social sphere. Focusing on the locus of her hair, the ideological constructions of gender and race are not judged as separable cultivations of identity. Race and gender are united within the sign of her hair, a figuration which demonstrates how difficult it is to "read" the body, while at the same time showing how "readings" of the body serve to effectively constitute the identities of those who get "read." Lily's desire to write her own signification through the trope of her hair is necessary but complicated by the "reading" which her "writing" invites.

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[15] Ibid., 266.

[16] Ibid.

The examples of moments of performance which I have so far cited from the text portray the desire to rewrite imposed signification. It is not that these characters want to escape into nonsignifying existence, but rather that they seek to appropriate their own "meanings," their own identities, and write them with their own desires. However, there is a profound difference between the dramatization of this rewriting, and the actual achievement of it on some practical scale. The theatre piece itself, I propose, is engaged in an appropriation and rewriting of signification. In *spell #7* the image of a blackface mask of minstrel performances haunts the action, both visually and thematically. A thorough dissection of the use of that mask indicates how shange's theatre piece is engaged in a highly complex disruption of the signifier. Supplementing my own reading of *spell #7* is Karen Cronacher's essay "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic in Ntozake Shange's *spell #7*," which examines shange's deconstruction of the historic and contemporary meaning of the mask of minstrelsy.

The performers in *spell #7* first appear (except for Lou) wearing masks which are grotesque parodies of the blackface makeup worn during minstrelsy performances. Further, above them hangs a huge version of this same mask. The mask is a signifier, historically constructed by white American culture. Cronacher claims that this signifier "reveals nothing whatsoever about African Americans,"[17] yet I feel shange's theatre piece posits otherwise. Cronacher proposes that the mask is a signifier which was constructed to represent a lie, a fictional signified, and as a result, Cronacher claims, it is not relevant to the lives of

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[17] Karen Cronacher, "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic in Ntozake Shange's *spell #7*," in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 44 No. 2 (May 1992): 178.

African-Americans. I myself feel that shange portrays this sign as one which has been constructed as a functional, painfully valid element of African-American existence, and *spell #7* attempts, through the disruption of the sign of the minstrel mask, to shift its signification, in effect "rewriting" what the mask "means."

At the beginning of *spell #7*, the mask of minstrelsy carries a number of different connotations, all hinging around the cultivation of existence which African-Americans suffer at the hands of their white colonizers. Shange notes in her script that before the play has started there is a

> *huge black-face mask hanging from the ceiling of the theater as the audience enters. in a way the show has already begun, for the members of the audience must integrate this grotesque, larger-than-life misrepresentation of life into their preshow chatter.*[18]

Karen Cronacher posits that this image of white hegemony and colonial desire "literally and figuratively dominates the scene of *spell #7*, confronting the audience with the minstrel mask's historic role in the American theatre, and the question of its enduring power."[19] As a product of white men's neurosis, the mask inspires Cronacher to discuss how this image is addressing and concerned with white men. However, despite her claim that the mask "reveals nothing whatsoever about African Americans" shange appears to me to be addressing the idea that the blackface mask has played a powerful role in the constitution of blk identity - this is the problem *spell #7* is addressing and trying to resolve. With the full context of the mask in mind, I propose that *spell #7* is a dramatic machine which attempts the rewriting of blk identity. I read this as an appropriation of signification which appears to be the only possible escape from racist inscription of identity. My reading of the Minstrel Mask owes much to Gates' *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates' book brings to light the various manners in which figures may be appropriated and, through the manipulation of linguistic forms, rewritten in signification.[20]

Cronacher describes the mask as a "question," and indeed the mask could be symbolized by a question mark, as it is a sliding signifier which eludes precise meaning, shifting in effect as the play progresses. Yet it seems strange to me for Cronacher to say the "face underneath the mask of blackface is always already white."[21] Her comment appears to connote that there is some basic truth, or essence, held by the blackface mask. Cronacher refers to the historical tradition of minstrelsy, wherein white men covered themselves with blackface, creating an image of a constructed black identity that was white underneath. Cronacher's observation is astute and pertinent concerning the history of minstrelsy, but does not, I feel, correspond with what *spell #7* shows an audience. If there is a white presence in *spell #7*, it is the mask itself which is white, despite the literal colour of the mask. The mask portrayed in *spell #7* has no underside.[22] It is a surface without intrinsic nature. The meaning it carries can be changed. Shange, by having the actors perform "a series of steps that identify every period of afro-american entertainment"[23] while wearing those blackface masks, is challenging the entire tradition of African-American entertainment, accusing it all of being a performance aiming to appease whites. The dance reiterates the idea that from the moment the colonial gaze was set upon blks, their lives became performance. Shange, I feel, is at the start of *spell #7* establishing a very painful concept: the mask of minstrelsy has played a formative role in African-American culture.

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[18] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 247.

[19] Karen Cronacher, "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic...," 177.

[20] I make reference to *The Signifying Monkey* in the first and second chapters of this thesis. It was a seminal text in the formation of a throughline for my work.

The characters in the play interact with the floating (literally and figuratively) signifier of the blackface mask, and through their relationship with it, define its "meaning." "Lou" becomes the crucial catalyst figure in this play through his relationship with the huge mask. He performs the role of "Mr. Interlocutor," a figure out of the minstrel shows, the straight man who sets up jokes and regulates events.[24] His magic is "blk magic," which he learned from his father, a "colored" magician. Lou has the power to "fix" people up so that they will be "colored & love it." As shange indicates, the blackface masks of the actors "belie the magician's promise." Lou's claim is tainted with irony by the presence of the masks worn by the actors. Lou reveals through his words the power he has over the actors. He cries "SPELL #7" and they perform the above-mentioned "series of steps." The text reveals the purpose of this performance: Lou "speaks now [as a companion of the mask] to the same audience who fell so easily into his hands & who were so aroused by the way the black-faced figures 'sang n danced'."[25] Shange describes in a program note how the audience indeed took this dance performance at face value, applauding in appreciation of the minstrelsy rather than perceiving the deeply ironic tone to the stage business:

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[21] Ibid.

[22] My "argument" with Cronacher is included here not so much to indicate the difference between our points of view, a difference which may be marginal, as to illustrate how her article was key to the formation of my own reading of the text.

[23] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 249.

[24] Karen Cronacher,"Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic...," 185.

> in *spell #7* i included a prologue of a minstrel show/ which made me cry the first times i danced in it/ for the same reasons i had included it. the minstrel may be "banned" as racist/ but the minstrel is more powerful in his deformities than our alleged rejection of him/ for every night we wd be grandly applauded.[26]

Thus, at the beginning of the play, the blackface mask represents the power of white hegemony to distort and construct blk lives as performances for whites. This power is referred to as blk magic.

"Blk magic," like the blackface mask, functions as a transitive sign, with an elusive, unfixed "meaning." It is the dramatic power of *spell #7*, a power which carries connotations both positive and negative. Blk magic seems to be thematically entwined with both the mask and the African-American dance numbers, signifying both the power of performance to draw in an audience and the power of colonialist desire to construct the identities of blks. Lou's "spell," which he calls "spell #7," is a spell of performance that enslaves both audience and performers. The fact that the title of shange's theatre piece is *spell #7* causes the blackface "song n dance" to resonate as a trope for the entire theatre piece. The stage directions describe the huge blackface mask as "his father, the ancestors, our magic."[27] Shange's words indicate an appropriation of the symbol of white hegemony, an appropriation of the mask, and also casts a negative slant upon the ancestors, the father, their magic. I feel it is a gesture from shange which indicates that she believes it is her responsibility to change the significance of the mask, to break down and rewrite the construction, because to reject it outright and say it never had anything to do with African-American culture would be to allow it to retain its power, but to appropriate and rewrite it is to negate it of the power of its initial creators. She accomplishes this by subtly shifting the meaning of the mask as the play progress. The theatre piece in effect Signifies through the manipulation of tropes and figurative imagery. In this sense, "spell #7" is a blk magic spell which changes the signification of the blackface mask by the end of the play.

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[25] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 249.

[26] Ntozake Shange, *See No Evil: Prefaces, Essays and Accounts 1976-1983* (San Francisco: Momo's Press, 1989) 22.

[27] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 248.

Sandra L. Richards makes the following observation about the ending of shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, concerning the effect this choreopoem has on its audience:

> It is important to note the major challenge that Shange undertakes, for it is a risk similar to that involved in combat breath. The playwright depends on the spontaneity of the moment and the people on both sides of the footlights to carry a significant portion of her "message." [...] But inherent is the gamble that a sufficiently strong harmonizing force will appear to unify disparate elements, energize the audience/ congregation and release it back into the world able to withstand challenges and courageous enough to attempt the merger of the sacred and the profane.[28]

Richards further explains that she believes this tenuous unifying spontaneity is also shange's desired effect at the end of *spell #7*, yet Richards is skeptical about whether or not it is achieved. I believe her comment may be a valuable and valid one concerning *for colored girls...*, but does not take into account the ambiguous and challenging images which confront the audience at the end of *spell #7*.

The goal of *spell #7* should not be called communion for the audience, but there is a magical connection happening in the theatre. This is blk magic, and the full negative connotations habitually associated with the phrase "black magic" are ironically applied at the beginning of *spell #7*. Whereas the ending of *for colored girls...* works to spiritually heal and unify performers and audience, the theatrical magic of *spell #7* is grimly embodied by the elusive sign of the blackface mask. Shange makes clear that the magical power affecting the audience in this play radiates from this huge fabrication of white culture's "magic." At the end of *spell #7*, when the characters chant "colored & love it" as a "serious celebration. like church/ like home"[29] the possibility of any actor/audience communion at this moment appears to be disrupted by the descent of the huge minstrel mask. The song continues in the black, and all that is visible is the mask. Shange herself explains in a program note the effect of the return of the mask:

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[28] Sandra L. Richards, "Conflicting Impulses in the Plays of Ntozake Shange," in *Black American Literature Forum* Vol. 17 No. 2 (Summer 1983): 76.

> & after all that/ our true visions & rigors laid bare/ down from the ceiling comes the huge minstrel face/ laughing at all of us for having been so game/ we believed we could escape his powers/ how naive cd we be/ the magician explains:
>
> crackers are born with the right to be alive/
> i'm making ours up right here in yr face.[30]

At the beginning of *spell #7* the figures in this play are portrayed as enslaved by blk magic, which the blackface mask shows the audience is the product of white desire. The return of the huge blackface mask at the end seems to herald the return of enslavement under the sign of colonial hegemony. However, there has been a transformation occurring on stage throughout this performance, the purpose of which is to appropriate the "meaning" of the blackface mask, and make it signify anew what it means to be blk.

Lou's promise at *spell #7*'s opening, that the blks (whom he describes as "you") will be "colored n love it," is visually contradicted by the blackface masks worn by the actors. The mask of minstrelsy subsequently disappears, and the performers present a series of dramatic poems and dance pieces, centred around the rejection of white colonial influence in favour of a self-styled blk cultivation of identity. At the end of the play, Lou repeats what he said earlier, but now the actors are not wearing their masks. They chant "colored & love it" and then Lou stops them, and says the final lines of the theatre piece:

> crackers are born with the right to be
> alive/ i'm making ours up right here
> in yr face/ & we gonna be
> colored & love it.[31]

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[29] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 291.

[30] Ntozake Shange, *See no Evil* 23.

[31] Ntozake Shange, *spell #7* 291.

At this point Lou includes himself among the other blks on stage by saying "we." He seems to lose both the distance of "Mr. Interlocutor" as well as the sardonicism inherent to that role. Lou is speaking about himself, and that brings an added element of sincerity to his tone. What follows, the descent of the giant blackface mask, is more ambiguous than it might at first seem, if I were only thinking of the "meaning" of the mask as being the same as it was at the beginning of the play. It remains the symbol of white hegemony and desire, but also, through its association with blk magic, which has the power to break identity into pieces, the mask becomes a provocation of the audience members. The mask itself, through the actions of the play, has had its meaning rewritten, and now contains within itself both provocation (it is the symbol of colonial hegemony's control) and inspiration (it is signifier for blks of the power to rewrite your own meaning, to constitute your own identity.)

Of particular value in shange's piece is the problematization of "meaning," a problematization which is evident in my attempt to understand the signifier of the blackface mask. Even my reading of the sign of the mask cannot be understood as a confident interpretation, as I cannot claim objective exteriority to the issues it raises, due to, among other things, the colour of my skin, my gender, my nationality, and the language I predominantly use. As a result, I recommend the reader be suspicious of my words. I am conscious that my own desire to include shange's theatre piece within the subject of my thesis is problematic, keeping in mind the correlation between representation and colonialism which I myself have drawn herein. For me to write about the work of an African-American woman is effectively to construct a representation of her within my writing. My reading of *spell #7* is subjective, and subject to the same dilemma which occurs when the gaze is levelled at what I conceive of as the other, the person who is not like me. I read the Other. I would like to think that my inclusion of *spell #7* in this thesis is an attempt to open my subject matter up beyond the distant, critical analyses which I have so far privileged. What shange's theatre piece shows is perhaps the impossibility of reading anything "literally" in the sense that I use the word. Nothing simply "is," not even the body, as it is also always a signifier with arguable and potentially transitive meanings. This transitive nature of the signifier can be both empowering and restrictive. For the characters in this play, as for African-Americans in real life, the constrictive control which "meaning" imposes on existence is a power relation which must be appropriated and rewritten. At risk of tripping myself up, I read shange's theatre piece as being closer, in spirit, to Artaud's desires than any of the other writers I have so far involved in the discussion. For Artaud, the attack on signification was never an act of cold sophistry. It was always a matter of desperate need, and always remained for him a "necessity." Within shange's theatre piece, the necessity is more evident than ever, as her work is unwilling to concede the impossibility of escape from signification. She circumvents the issue by rewriting signification instead.

Summary: Artaud's writings, in the reading which I develop in chapter one, deconstruct the binarism between the literal and the figurative. His words present a discourse in which both the literal and the figurative are complicit and engaged in an intersubjective relationship within the realm of language. His language is a performative representation of the yearning to escape signification altogether. It is the frustrated yet persistent desire to escape representation which is performed and described in *The Theater and Its Double*. Artaud's writings describe life as we know it as always already differentiated from the logocentric concepts of absolute presence. There is, for Artaud, a parallel between our language and our existences. In Lacanian terms, the connexion between life and language may be found in the unconscious, which Lacan claims is structured like the signifying chain. Existence is a manifestation of communication. The two plays which I have "read" in this thesis present in a dramatic fashion ontological representations of "self" which reflect the same sentiments as found in Artaud's writings. The lives of the characters in these plays are entwined with convoluted images of performativity and construction. Lacking in essence, or absolute presence, these characters are performed as figurative images, like signifiers. The plays present visual tropes of the ideas which Artaud's writings present. These characters are lacking in fixed meaning, lacking in intrinsic signification, and are part and parcel of the complicated interplay of signifiers which constitute discourse. These characters reflect the limitations through which we perceive our own existences. Our perceptions of the world are no more "true" or "absolute" than the information communicated through language. Thus, the awareness that language has no fixed connexion with that which it signifies brings into question many aspects of our perceptions and understandings of "reality." Our common associations of "subject" with truth is an arbitrary observation which comes about as a result of logophonocentric assumptions which we make so that "meaning" may be discovered.

The disruption of the unity of the subject which occurs in dramatic form in these plays provides a new means of dealing with the textual disruption of the subject. If an actual person (actor) on stage is presenting a "subject" which is without unity or fixed parameters, this disrupted unity reflects on the human condition which the actor embodies. The presence of the body is, in Artaud's ideology, a "fact," which always precedes "reading" and "meaning." Within these plays the solid sign of the actor's body is not allowed to perpetuate the habitual illusion it offers: the "reality" of the represented subject, the "character." The disruption of the solidity of "character" by the play folds back upon the sign of the actor. The actor's body, to us, can only be a representation. If the actor's body is only a representation, then this reflects upon bodies in general. Everyone is only a representation. We are all representations, considered real only through the tropes of our bodies, our "selves."

The factor of colonial resistance as it is thematized in these plays is not only relevant for their exposure of logocentric desire, but also constitutes, if Deleuze and Guattari are listened to, an important connexion with Artaud's writings. The process of rejection of "meaning" and filiations is a manifestation of schizophrenic desire, and an inherently revolutionary one. The rejection of "meaning" in favour of an endorsement of "evil" which the characters in *The Screens* embrace may be seen as a manifestation of the desire for decoding and deterritorialization of desire as an anti-fascistic revolutionary measure, such as is described in *Anti-Oedipus*. shange's disruption of signification serves to realize a political offensive against the white hegemonic construction of blk identity in a manner which strikes at racist ideology at the level of thought: the structure of language and representation. shange, by recoding the mask of minstrelsy, may be read as an example of a rewriting and realization of the decoding of inscription which Deleuze and Guattari posit will always arise to undermine and destroy fascist codings.

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